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THE LIFE AND EAGER DEATH  
OF EMILY BRONTË





Emily Brontë's water-colour drawing of her pet merlin-hawk,  
October 27th, 1841.

*(Haworth Parsonage Museum.)*

“Pride, temper, derision blent in her large fine eye  
that had just now the look of a merlin’s.”

Charlotte Brontë, of Shurley, Emily Brontë's prototype

# THE LIFE AND EAGER DEATH OF EMILY BRONTË

*A Biography*

BY  
VIRGINIA MOORE



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FOR  
PRINCESS PIERRE TROUBETZKOY  
(who was the lovely Amélie Rives)  
because better than anyone I know  
she understands the mystic Emily.



“Emily must have been a remnant of the Titans.”

MRS. GASKELL in a letter.

“ . . . she  
(How shall I sing her ) whose soul  
Knew no fellow for night,  
Passion, vehemence, grief,  
Daring, since Byron died,  
That world-famed soul of fire—she, who sank  
Baffled, unknown, self-consumed ;  
Whose too bold dying song  
Stirred, like a clarion-blast, my soul.”

MATTHEW ARNOLD in “Haworth Churchyard.”

“Emily Brontë has always seemed to me a white  
flame and a dark flame rolling upward—but, mind  
you, no evil in the darkness.”

PRINCESS AMÉLIE TROUBETZKOY in conversation.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I WISH to thank the National Portrait Gallery for permission to reproduce Branwell Brontë's portrait of his sister Emily; the British Museum for permission to use facsimiles of six pages from the Smith Manuscript; the Brontë Society for kind permission to reproduce three pictures by Emily Brontë, as well as her baby-mug and writing-desk; Mrs. Henry H. Bonnell, wife of the donor, for gracious endorsement of that permission; Mrs. C. M. Edgerley, Secretary of the Society, and Mr. Rosse Butterfield, Curator of the Museum, for generous co-operation; and Mr. Basil Blackwell for permission to transcribe any Brontë documents in his fine reference-books, *Life and Letters*, and *Poems*, of the *Shakespeare Head Brontë*. Inasmuch as it was not always possible to examine original documents or to decipher them easily, when examined, the latter privilege has been an inestimable boon.

V. M.

## PREFACE

It is not bold, but merely honest, to declare that Emily Brontë was the author of the greatest novel ever written by a woman, and, at her best, with only Sappho, Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson as indisputable peers, one of the greatest women poets of all time. A century ago she was eighteen years old, with only twelve years of grace. And yet, since Mary F. Robinson's good but handicapped and too brief study of 1883, what, that is not unassimilated, or hysterical, or thin like a synopsis, or, in some sense, unthorough and incomplete, has been written about her life?

Believing that the purpose of biography is not only to relate facts, but to transmit personality, and not only to transmit personality, but to differentiate, as it were, a soul, in writing this book I have been acutely aware of dangers.

I visited every earthly place Emily lived or went in the body; even slept among the hundred-year-old damp of the Black Bull, above the room where, as Branwell chalked up "shots," Emily tapped a warning on the window. I pored over Charlotte's letters, with their not infrequent references to Emily, and Anne's two, and Emily's three. I carefully sifted an enormous bibliography, treasuring the bits about Emily, comparing them with other bits, testing their authenticity. I noted flagrant errors of date committed by Charlotte and perpetuated by others; and checked cross-references. I paid especial and respectful attention to primary sources: to Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor who had known her well; to Mrs. Gaskell (her facts, not her opinions) who had recorded conversations with Charlotte, Mr. Brontë, Martha Brown and Haworth villagers; to Miss Robinson who had interviewed Dr. Ingham, Mrs. Ratcliffe, Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Wood, and Mr. William Wood carpenter for the coffins of all the Brontës except Anne, and had had the splendid fortune to examine Emily's own marked copy of *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell*, now untraceable; and to a niece of Martha Brown who passed on to me, in 1933, her sharp memories of Martha Brown's memories, while she ironed shirts in a steaming Haworth kitchen and drops from wet aprons and petticoats dripped down upon my unprotesting head.

But most of all I read, reverently and critically, and brooded on, and tried to penetrate by whatever power of



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psychological divination I may have, all of Emily's extant poetry and prose. It is well known that lyric poetry, and particularly that of a very young person (Emily's most productive years for verse were between nineteen and twenty-three), is inevitably and intimately autobiographical. More than others Emily needed the vent of poetry, because more than others suppressed.

In studying this poetry I have had a signal advantage over previous commentators, in that now, in the admirable *Shakespeare Head Brontë* edited by T. J. Wise and J. A. Symington and published by Basil Blackwell, Oxford, there are available not only all the Brontë letters and documents, but the true texts of most of Emily's poetry, purged of those poems by Charlotte, Branwell and Anne which C. W. Hatfield discovered Clement Shorter had erroneously attributed to her. The twenty-one poems printed with her sisters' in 1846, as well as many published by Charlotte in 1850, are without even approximate dates in the *Shakespeare Head Brontë*; but, by carefully matching these to facsimiles and by internal evidence, with the help of new material, I have finished the definite or approximate dating of all of Emily's poems.

Moreover, I have discovered in an Emily Brontë manuscript in the British Museum not only new dates, and three unpublished poems of biographical significance,<sup>1</sup> but a provocative name pencilled over the poem, "I knew not 'twas so dire a crime." These forty-three *Glendale Poems* are not yet catalogued by the British Museum; but a tentative identification card in the George Smith Memorial Case says, "The notes in pencil are by the Rev. A. B. Nicholls." This, from my microscopic study of hand-writings, I believe to apply only to the "ABN"s and large and small circle-indications of preference. The crosses, stars, sketches of a pointing hand and recurrent word "Pubd" I believe to be signposts erected by Charlotte in choosing the selection of Emily's verse appended to the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights*—though about some of the choices she later changed her mind. The dates and Gondal names and initials are of course by Emily, as well as ink corrections; but the pencil titles and changes—which include that provocative name—are Charlotte's. All this is of great importance to a biographer, and all

<sup>1</sup> More precisely, two and seven-ninths. See facsimiles at back of book.

## PREFACE

unbroken ground. No spade was sunk into it by Dodd, Mead and Company's privately-printed limited edition of *Poems by Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë* of 1902, which added sixty-seven unpublished poems by Emily to those of 1846 and 1850; nor by Hodder & Stoughton's *Complete Poems of Emily Brontë* of 1910, which added seventy-one new poems; nor by the *Complete Poems* of 1923, which, while subtracting those poems which had been wrongly attributed, brought the total number to a hundred and ninety-one; nor by that otherwise definitive reference work and compendium, the *Shakespeare Head Brontë*. In other words, for eighty-seven-odd years this little four-by-six notebook with wine-red covers has guarded its secrets.

For corroborative purposes I quote practically all of Emily's poems in my text; and whenever possible, at risk of slowing the pace and encumbering the style, quote entire, because that seems fairer to Emily. Collating the poems with her life was as exciting as working a new-staked goldmine. Last February Abbé Dimnet remarked in *The Saturday Review of Literature*: "The most immediate need for Brontë students is undoubtedly a synchronized table of their movements in connection with their production." Such a table I had charted for Emily before I dared write a word.

But was *Wuthering Heights* autobiographical? I had no right to assume so, since many novels are objective and impersonal. But Heathcliff could only be the "melancholy boy" who grows so grimly into the "iron man" of the poems; who, in turn, by innumerable clues and substantiations, could only be Emily herself; and, once Heathcliff was identified, the parallel between Emily's inner life and *Wuthering Heights* up to the death of the first Cathy was as clear as the noonday sun; and this half-unconscious, half-conscious allegory seen to be as rich a vein of ore as any biographer interested in spiritual development could possibly tap: so rich that Ellen Nussey's remark, sedulously repeated through the years, that "so little is known of Emily Brontë," seemed suddenly inaccurate.

I have in general stayed very close to my sources, permitting myself to infer a fact from, say, ten given facts, only when the inference represented such a high degree of probability as to be morally certain. For instance, my first page might appear at a glance to be based on guesses and assumptions; whereas actually it is ten parts knowledge and

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one part warrantable deduction. Miss Elizabeth Firth's Diary records that the Brontë family moved from Thornton to Haworth in April 1820, with seven cartloads of furniture. Now I know they rode in a carriage because the usual gig would not have held two grown people, a nursemaid and six children; and that April is cold in Yorkshire, for I have shivered there in April; and how the road winds from Thornton to Haworth, for I have travelled it; and how most of their household effects looked, for they exist in the Parsonage Museum to-day. Furthermore, I know the mountain-steepness of the cobbled main street of Haworth, for I have climbed it, puffing and forced every few minutes to rest, and have heard wagon-drivers curse as they jumped out to lead slipping horses. Hence, with a little reliably attested, and much known first hand, I have felt justified in referring to the momentary clouds of the condensed breath of horses, and of drivers shouting, and so forth. . . . The infrequent instances where, working by deduction, I have dared fill out a picture imaginatively announce themselves, since such liberties, unless trivial, I have taken pains to make obvious in the text. A biography is bound to be in some small degree constructional if it is to have value: otherwise it would be without interpretation and little more than a compendium. Besides, sources being full for some periods and sparse, with appalling blanks, for others, what, if not a responsible imagination, can do the necessary cohering?

But in my efforts to quicken inorganic parts into an organic whole, and breathe vital life into the nostrils, I have wished to recreate not a legend (to indulge sentimentalists) but the irreducible Emily Brontë, unexaggerated, unaltered, unobscured; since Dr. Johnson's dictum is eminently wise :

"The value of every story depends on its being true. A story is a picture either of an individual, or of human nature in general: if it be false it is a picture of nothing."

VIRGINIA MOORE.

*Scottsville, Virginia,  
August, 1935.*

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# I

## FOOT OF THE HILL

SEVEN horses lowered their heads, seven carts rumbled, as they began the long hard pull up Haworth's main street. It was the spring of 1820. Willingly would the seven horses have been uncoupled, for the carts were heavy and creaking with the new parson's furniture: a four-poster, a mahogany side-table with turned brass handles, a grandfather clock, six Hepplewhite chairs, copper saucepans, tin cullenders, pewter, china, earthenware, a birchwood rocking-chair with slot-back and tapestry seat, a washstand, a chest of drawers, a horsehair sofa with rolled ends, and sundry other good, solid, unelaborate articles.<sup>1</sup> But, whips singing out in the early morning air the drivers shouted, and contradicted, and jumped down and led the horses by their bridles. The flagstones had been laid end to end to prevent slipping, but still the horses' hooves, not being cats' claws, slipped. The breaths of the heaving animals formed thick vapours on the chill April atmosphere, that dispersed and were lost and came again.

The houses and shops lining the perpendicular street were grey stone blackened by soot; the first stories being constructed on a Yorkshire plan, more or less alike: two windows and a slit-door, from which peered the suspicious faces of a rough citizenry. Half-way up, the cliff-like street curved left; and a sign could be deciphered at the top, slung, with a lantern, to the Black Bull Inn. Now the road relaxed a little; was not quite so arduous. "Where's the Parsonage?" demanded a driver of a native, who pointed sullenly. So the tavern was not the top. Beyond was a church, and beyond the church, a graveyard. And beyond the graveyard, sitting somewhat higher, isolated and proud, the Parsonage. But even the Parsonage was not the top. Beyond, sloping ever up, was the bare beautiful lonely waste of Haworth moors.<sup>2</sup>

The seven groaning carts stopped at the side gate of the big square strange house and, while talk was bandied about, and bodies jostled, and there was grumbling and a few jests to keep the drivers warm, were unloaded.

After the carts (there would have been no use waiting in

<sup>1</sup> Museum.

<sup>2</sup> Gaskell, 3-5, and Chap. II; personal observation.



an empty unheated house) the new parson and his populous family arrived in a carriage.

The Rev. Patrick Brontë was a tall, strong, handsome Irishman whose speech and manner were scarcely Irish at all, for Anglicanism, along with his Cornish wife, he had wooed assiduously and won. Since at fifty his hair was white, now, at forty-three, he was already grey. His face was long and oval; his forehead ample; his nose substantial in size and classic in straightness.<sup>1</sup> For weak eyes he used silver-framed spectacles,<sup>2</sup> holding a pair of second-best steel ones<sup>2</sup> in reserve. Nothing else about him was weak. His manner warned against anyone disputing that he was head of the family.

His wife Maria would have been the last to dispute it. She was a little woman with bosom pushed up high in the current Empire fashion; a nose surprisingly large for a lady so delicate; a tight but sweet mouth, and doe-like expression: not pretty but something better—neat, and even, in simple unassuming taste, elegant.<sup>1</sup>

She looked tired as they drew alongside their new home, sombre as a fortress. The six-mile trip from Thornton had not been smooth for a woman who had given birth only two months before to her sixth child in seven years—the fifth girl, now crying softly in her arms. She passed it to Nancy Garrs, a kind eager girl of fifteen or sixteen, with long swooping nose. Nancy, grasping it under the arms in the immemorial manner of nurse-maids, jounced it.

The other children were singularly quiet; but bright-eyed as chipmunks over the adventure of moving from Thornton to Haworth. Maria the eldest was seven, small and delicate, with grey eyes and a broad intelligent benign brow; somewhat slattern in appearance, but marvellously amenable. Elizabeth the second child, nearly six, was intelligent too, but not distinguished by any particular quality or accomplishment. Charlotte the third was dwarfed for four years, with eyes close-set and a proper conduct beginning to be imposed on a tempestuous spirit. Branwell, the only boy and therefore idol of his parents and sisters, was a pleasing little fellow of two years and nine months, with a sloping forehead and mop of bright red hair.

But Emily was the child to look twice at. She had not waited even a year, but crowded into the world on the heels of her brother; and as the weary fifth been perhaps less

<sup>1</sup> Paintings and daguerreotypes.

<sup>2</sup> Museum.

loved and longed-for during the dark probation before birth. On arriving at Haworth she was one year and nine months old: still a baby, though already displaced from the carved cradle; but unlike the others not small for her age. Great blue eyes looked out from under dark, fine, curling hair.<sup>1</sup>

The children piled out of the carriage and scrambled up a narrow gravel path to the stone house, which, larger than the Thornton Parsonage, appeared to them magnificent. But how could they ever like the new as well as the old? Their trip across the half-green moors had seemed like hundreds of miles instead of six. Oh, a graveyard half circled the house!<sup>2</sup> They knew graveyards—there had been one at Thornton! Lower on the hill was Papa's new church looking odd with its ancient tower—not at all like Bell Chapel in Thornton. The older children stared, seeing two churches side by side. But Emily saw only one: she made no comparisons, being too young for Thornton to have painted on her mind a clear brilliant picture—her mind was a pure tablet for taking the image and impress of this house between a graveyard and a moor.

The slate-roofed house was in good Georgian style, two windows with small panes staring from each side of the columned front door, downstairs and up, and a ninth one over the door. The Brontës entered a central hall paved with stones two feet square and divided midway by an arch; to face a stone stair with a turned wooden banister mounting to a landing, above which a large window let light. The room to the right of the entrance Mr. Brontë had chosen as his study, to hold his desk.<sup>3</sup> The larger room to the left was to serve as both dining- and sitting-room. Behind the study were the kitchen and washroom; behind the sitting-room a small store-room for peat. Upstairs, four chambers and a tiny box-room made by walling off the end of the "lobby." In 1820 sanitary arrangements were practically unheard of in Yorkshire. One ran outdoors, in the bitterest blasts, for sessions in a small stone edifice. The Parsonage's was just behind the kitchen.<sup>4</sup>

The first task on moving in was to spread matting on the stone floors of the two front rooms. No matting was allowed

<sup>1</sup> *Shakespeare Head Brontë, Life and Letters*, IV, 88.

<sup>2</sup> On the side of the house opposite the road, an old photograph shows a little gate opening into the graveyard.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, IV, 91.

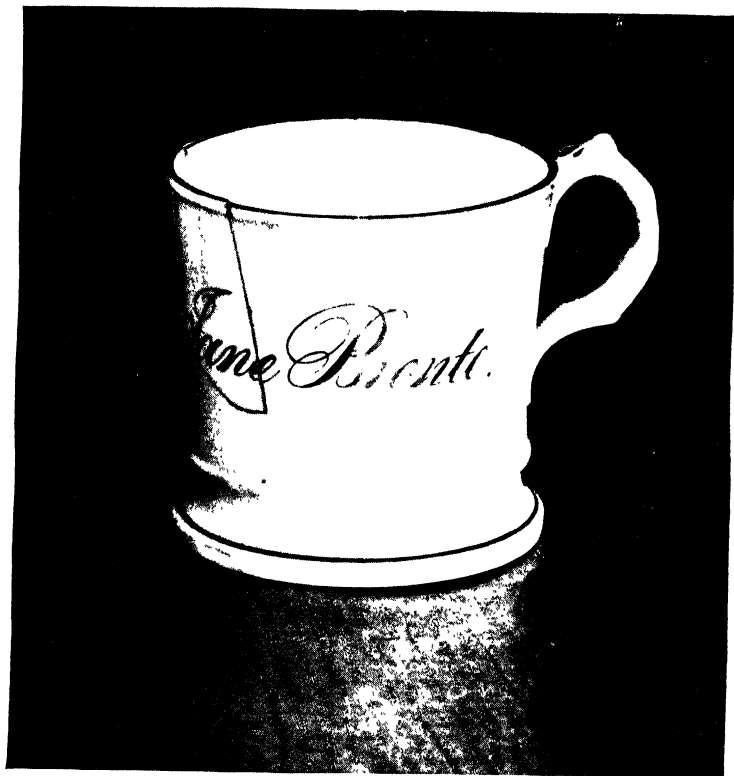
<sup>4</sup> Personal research in Haworth.

on the wooden floors upstairs, Mr. Brontë considering it a frivolous invitation to fire. Chairs were stationed, tables set up, books marshalled in rows on shelves; the grandfather clock installed on the stair-landing and coaxed to tick in its familiar voice; the Thornton pots and pans hung by the new kitchen-stove in bright array. All of which must have seemed to the children a proof.

Yesterday they had been far away; this morning before dawn far away. But here they were all gathered—even Anne the baby. Here was Nancy Garrs, who had helped raise them. Here was Mamma. And here, to clench everything, like a nail driven through boards, Papa. The children shouted and tumbled over each other in their excitement, and Papa reminded them sternly that children were to be seen but not heard. Then they knew indeed that, though still a little strange, this was home.

That night the next-to-the-youngest drank milk from her own mug<sup>1</sup> imported, intact, from Thornton. Of white china, it bore in gold script the positive legend: Emily Jane Brontë.

<sup>1</sup> Museum.



Emily Brontë's white china gold-lettered baby-mug.  
(*Haworth Parsonage Museum.*)



## II

### ANTECEDENTS

PSYCHOLOGISTS have never agreed as to the relative importance of heredity and environment in the formation of character. Blood tells—but how much? One is not the sum total of one's forebears any more than one is the sum total of one's experiences in the various localities in which one has lived. There exists an imponderable element. But among all those people who had to be born, and do things, and fail to do things, before they died, in order that Emily Brontë might walk the earth physically, were there none to whom she was indebted for more than the accommodation of having transmitted some jiggled chromosomes?

Patrick Prunty<sup>1</sup> was born of peasant stock on St. Patrick's Day, 1777, at Emdale in the parish of Drumballyronev, County of Down, Ireland; and with his nine younger brothers and sisters, William, Hugh, James, Welsh, Jane, Mary, Rose, Sarah and Alice, grew up in a turfed cottage among meagre acres. It has been vaguely reported that these humble Celts were descendants of an ancient line—but the claim, if they themselves ever advanced it, was doubtless but the forgivable falsehood of human beings craving outward symbol and recognition of an inward sense of distinction, of nobility, of being greater than anything yet proved.<sup>2</sup> The sandy-haired father of the brood, Hugh Prunty, had emigrated from the south to the "black north" of Ireland; had married, in 1776, in the parish church at Magherally, fair-haired Elinor (or Alice) McClory of Ballinasceagh, a Protestant convert; and begun the long fight without quarter, for sustenance, against the loved but stubborn land. Sometimes Hugh Prunty worked in a lime-kiln and a cornkiln, and once hired out to a country gentleman named Harshaw, but always the land lured him back. His surname was spelled "Brunty" and "Bruntree" in the baptismal entries in the Drumgooland registry—but the Prunty family by any other name was no less iron-muscled and comely.

But only Patrick stirred under the goad of ambition. He became a hand-loom weaver; then at sixteen teacher of the Presbyterian school at Glascar Hill a mile away; and, two years later, master of the Episcopalian parish school at

<sup>1</sup> Later, Brontë.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, IV, 184.

Drumballyrone; then, encouraged by Mr. Tighe the kindly vicar, a student at St. John's College, Cambridge, where he won three valuable bursaries, a stipend from William Wilberforce, and in 1806 at the age of twenty-nine his B.A. degree. Said Henry Martyn, the Cornish Missionary:

"Mr. Bronte has twice given me some account of his outset to college, which for its singularity has hardly been equalled, I suppose, since the days of Bishop Latimer. He left his native Ireland . . . with seven pounds, having been able to lay by no more. . . . He reached Cambridge before that was expended, and then received an unexpected supply of £5 from a distant friend. On this he subsisted some weeks before entering St. John's, and has since had no other assistance than what the college afforded. There is reason to hope that he will be an instrument of good to the church. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

In the list of admissions to Cambridge the name, in another's handwriting, was spelled "Patrick Branty," but his matriculation signature, the first of his own extant, was "Patr. Bronte." At Wethersfield in Essex, where he proceeded as curate after taking orders in the Church of England, he occasionally switched to "Bronté"—doubtless inspired by the Dukedom of Bronté lately conferred on Lord Nelson. "Brontè" with the diaeresis was the peculiar honour reserved for Haworth.<sup>2</sup>

Notwithstanding this metamorphosis the name was originally "O'Prunty." Douglas Hyde found a manuscript-romance written in Gaelic in 1763 by one Patrick O'Prunty, probably a first cousin of Hugh Prunty. The colophon to *The Adventures of the Son of Ice Counsel* runs in translation: "I pray the blessing of each reader in honour of the Trinity and the Virgin Mary on the author, that is, Patrick O'Prunty son of Niall, son of Seathan . . . April ye 20, 1763." And a translation of the first quatrain:

Ninety millions of true welcomes  
From me to the coming of the high King  
Who is come to us now with victory  
As a guide over the chief-hosts. . . <sup>3</sup>

In Wethersfield the good-looking curate lodged with a seventy-year-old lame spinster, Miss Mildred Davy; who

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 36-38; *Sketch*, March 10, 1897; *Life and Letters*, I, 2-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 3, Note. It has also been claimed that the name derived from Bronterra or the Greek Bronte. (*Ibid.*, IV, 184, 185.)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 4, Note; Hyde, 49.

happened to have a fatherless niece Mary Burder, oldest of four children, who lived three miles away in a many-windowed farmhouse, "The Broad." One day blue-eyed Mary was sent by her mother to Aunt Davy with a gift of game, and, eager for it to be prepared for dinner without delay, rolled up her sleeves, and was just winding the roasting-jack, hands all floury, when in stepped the new curate. Henceforth, errands to Aunt Davy were a joy. The curate and eighteen-year-old girl lent each other books while, under cover of household ceremony, and walking across fields to "The Broad," he wooed her with Irish eloquence. Her mother and aunt acquiesced, but an uncle-guardian who kept jealous watch on the girl's heritage cold-heartedly inquired as to the young ecclesiast's connections and, getting no answer, invited his cowering niece to his house in Yeldham and locked her up. But this affair between a young girl of calm mind and a curate almost twice her age whose mind was "subject to great tidal waves of passion" persisted. For three years the lovers corresponded; for three years Patrick ardently remembered that Mary had promised. Then he forgot. For meanwhile, early in 1809, he had moved to Wellington in Shropshire, and later that same year to Dewsbury in Yorkshire—where the ladies were charming. At last Mary's pride was irreparably hurt.<sup>1</sup>

At Dewsbury Mr. Bronte distinguished himself by three exploits: flinging off a path-blocking bully as if he were made of straw; agitating and securing the acquittal of a man wrongfully convicted of deserting the King's army; and, in 1811, solemnly announcing from the pulpit that under no circumstances would he preach there again, having heard a churchwarden remark that Mr. John Buckworth the vicar, whose curate he was, "should not keep a dog and bark himself."

Mr. Buckworth suspended his well-known hymn-writing to assist his curate to a living at Hartshead—and a wife.<sup>2</sup>

Miss Maria Branwell of Penzance was visiting her father's sister, Mrs. John Fennell, whose husband was Governor and Headmaster of the recently-opened Woodhouse Grove Wesleyan Academy, Hartshead. Maria was not very pretty (having a large nose) nor very young (being thirty); but refined, loyal, modest, and gentle; and she flattered Mr. Bronte's vanity while thinking she merely praised. They

<sup>1</sup> Birrell, 18-23, and *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Yates, *passim*.



were probably introduced by Mr. William Morgan, a gentleman with a severely high forehead pushed in from the rest of his face and a sudden, odd, hooked nose, formerly Mr. Brontë's fellow-curate at Wellington, and now, as curate of Guiseley Church, engaged to Mr. Fennell's only daughter, Jane. Later, one of the books in Mr. Brontë's scant library was a book entitled *Sermons or Homilies appointed to be read in the time of Elizabeth of Famous Memory*<sup>1</sup> in which he had written: "The Rev. P. Brontë's Book, presented to him by his Friend W. Morgan, as a Memorial of the pleasant and agreeable friendship which subsisted between them at Wellington—and as a token of the same friendship which, as is hoped, will continue for ever."

The romance flourished like a green bay. "I thought of you much on Sunday," Miss Branwell wrote in her first letter, "and feared you would not escape the rain. I hope you do not feel any bad effects from it? . . . Your letter has caused me some foolish embarrassment, tho' in pity to my feelings they have been very sparing of their raillery. I will now candidly answer your questions. The *politeness of others* can never make me forget your kind intentions, neither can *I walk our accustomed rounds* without thinking on you, and, why should I be ashamed to add, wishing for your presence. If you knew what were my feelings whilst writing this you would pity me. I wish to write the truth and give you satisfaction, yet fear to go too far, and exceed the bounds of propriety." Between August 25 and September 5 the importunate Irishman was promoted from "my dear friend" to "my dearest friend"; and happiness occasioned decorous bantering: "Have you not been too hasty in informing your friends of a certain event? Why did you not leave them to guess a little longer? . . . I do, indeed, sometimes think of you." But she was at heart a very serious lady: "O my dear friend," she wrote, "let us pray much that we may live lives holy and useful to each other and all around us!" After a picnic at Kirstall Abbey she wrote: "My esteem for you and my confidence in you is so great, that I firmly believe you will never exact anything from me which I could not conscientiously perform. . . . For some years I have been perfectly my own mistress, subject to no *control* whatever—so far from it that my sisters who are many years older than myself, and even my dear mother, used to consult me in every case of importance, and scarcely ever

<sup>1</sup> Museum.

doubted the propriety of my opinions and actions. Perhaps you will be ready to accuse me of vanity for mentioning this, but you must consider that I do not *boast* of it, I have many times felt it a disadvantage; and although, I thank God, it never led me into error, yet, in circumstances of perplexity and doubt, I have deeply felt the need of a guide and instructor." Patrick felt very much the big strong man. "It is pleasant to be subject to those we love," wrote Maria; and Patrick might have responded, "It is pleasant to have them, my dear, in subjection." Which house should they lease in Hartshead? "Oh" cried Maria, "what sacred pleasure there is in the idea of spending an eternity together in perfect and uninterrupted bliss!" But, later, "How could my dear friend so cruelly disappoint me?" wrote Maria. "I fear I should not have slept in peace tonight if I had been deprived of this opportunity of relieving my mind by scribbling to you, and now I lament that you cannot possibly receive this till Monday. May I hope that there is now some intelligence on the way to me? Or must my patience be tried till I see you on Wednesday? But what nonsense am I writing! Surely after this you can have no doubt that you possess all my heart." Maria always carried a copy of Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ, Abridged and Published in English by John Wesley, M.A.*,<sup>1</sup> and she performed her Christian duties without flinching, but—it became harder and harder to think on God. "I trust in your hours of reticence you will not forget to pray for me," she wrote her distractor. "I assure you I need every assistance to help me forward; I feel that my heart is more ready to attach itself to earth than heaven." Charming earth. On October 21st "my dearest friend" became "my beloved friend" and "he whom I love beyond all others." "The affection I bear him," she declared bravely, "is not at all inferior to that which he feels for me—indeed I sometimes think that in truth and constancy it excels." And a month later: "My dear saucy Pat—Now don't you think you deserve this epithet, far more, than I do that which you have given me? I really know not what to think of the beginning of your last; the winds, waves and rocks almost stunned me. I thought you were giving me an account of some terrible dream . . . having no idea that your imagination could make so much of the slight reproof conveyed in my last. What will you say then when you get a *real*,

<sup>1</sup> Museum.

*downright scolding?* . . . But I cannot allow that your affection is more deep-rooted than mine. However we will dispute no more about this—but rather embrace every opportunity to prove its sincerity and strength, by acting, in every respect, as friends and fellow-pilgrims, travelling the same road, actuated by the same motives, and having in view the same end. I think, if our lives are spared twenty years hence, I shall then pray for you with the same, if not greater, fervour and delight. . . . I firmly believe that the Almighty has set us apart for each other.”

One day she announced that the box in which her sisters had dispatched her clothes and books had been shipwrecked and washed up and broken on the rocky Devonshire coast—“all my little property, with the exception of a very few articles, swallowed up in the mighty deep”; but on December 5 had the heart again to indulge in badinage: “So you *thought* that *perhaps* I *might* expect to hear from you. As the case was so doubtful and you were in such great haste, you might as well have deferred writing a few days longer. . . .” She had been reading Lord Lyttelton’s *Advice to a Lady*. “When I read those lines, ‘Be never cool reserve with passion joined, with caution choose, but then be fondly kind, etc.’, my heart smote me. . . . Do you think,” she asked anxiously, “that you have cause to complain of me? If you do, let me know it. . . .”

This letter, the last of hers extant, mentions the wedding-cakes to be made next week.

The wedding took place December 29, 1812, in Guiseley Church, affording “pleasure to all parties”: a double wedding, for, while Mr. Fennell gave away first his daughter and then his niece, Mr. Brontë officiated for William Morgan and Jane Fennell, and then Mr. Morgan for Patrick Brontë and Maria Branwell. Curiously, at the same hour, by excited arrangement, Charlotte Branwell a sister of Maria and her cousin Joseph Branwell were married at Penzance in far Cornwall.

Maria was proud of her husband: good-looking, tall, in carriage a ramrod, Cambridge graduate and—most marvellous—author of *Cottage Poems*.<sup>1</sup> In those days no less than now local poets were esteemed for the spectacular exploit of having broken into print, regardless of the merit or demerit of the verse. The Rev. Patrick Brontë was a local poet—or, more exactly, a local bard. The colophon to *Cottage Poems*

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 6–23, 30.

unwittingly confesses the calibre of this book bound in blue-grey boards:

All you who turn the sturdy soil,  
Or ply the loom with daily toil,  
Or lowly on, through life turmoil  
For scanty fare  
Attend: and gather richest spoil  
To soothe your care.

But Miss Branwell had only pretended to be off-handed when she wrote: "My cousin desires me to say that she expects a long poem on her birthday." Not every young lady had a fiancé who could compose poems at short notice. Doubtless she hoped Jane's would be something grand and astonishing—like the "Epistle to the Rev. J—— B—— while journeying for the recovery of his health."<sup>1</sup>

Patrick on his part knew that he had done extraordinarily well by himself in catching Miss Maria Branwell. Thank God nothing of the peasant about her—with gentlefolk for kin and an annuity of £50. Her father Thomas Branwell, musician, merchant, and esteemed Councillor to the Corporation of Penzance, had worn a high-crowned beaver hat; and her second brother Benjamin Carne Branwell was no less than Mayor! The mother, born Anne Carne, had died in 1809, a year after her husband; but the orphaned Maria was well fortified with kin: three brothers and seven sisters. The Carnes and Branwells belonged to the best society in Penzance, which, though still rather primitive, had lately taken to spreading carpets instead of sprinkling sea-sand, and using silver forks, and curtailing, along with the ancient pastime of smuggling, extreme dissipation and violence. The Branwells, in especial, were law-abiding Methodists who cheerfully obeyed the behest on Maria's sampler, finished at eight: "Flee from sin as from a serpent, for if thou comest too near to it, it will bite thee. The teeth thereof are as the teeth of a lion to slay the souls of men."<sup>2</sup> The Bronte children were, without exception, named after the Branwells.<sup>3</sup>

Though otherwise shy, these children had not been shy about stepping forth. No sooner had Patrick and Maria settled comfortably into a house at the top of Clough Lane, Hightown, Hartshead-cum-Clifton, than Maria was born, and fifteen months later, Elizabeth. Mr. Bronte felt quite

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 28, 29.

<sup>2</sup> Gaskell, 55.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 39–41; *Life and Letters*, I, 31.

lyrical. About this time he published at his own expense *The Rural Minstrel: A Miscellany of Descriptive Poems*.

But in 1815, the year the little family moved to Thornton near Bradford, he sobered down to prose, writing *The Cottage in the Wood; or, the Art of Becoming Rich and Happy*, a lugubrious *Pamela* in which an innocent girl converts and marries a roué. The following spring Charlotte was born, and a year and three months later, Branwell.<sup>1</sup>

Branwell, long envisaged, was a real achievement. But the efflorescence should have stopped there. In spite of Maria's pious paper on *The Advantages of Poverty in Religious Concerns* written "for insertion in one of the periodical publications,"<sup>2</sup> it was devilish hard to shoe six pairs of feet and fill six mouths with oatmeal. The Parsonage on Market Street, which had seemed rather large at first, with each year shrank. In vain Mrs. Brontë longed for leisure to enjoy their new friends at Kipping House, Mr. John Firth and his eighteen-year-old daughter Elizabeth. Continuous pregnancy does not confer aplomb on a retiring nature. What dismay to discover, long before Branwell was weaned, that it was all to happen over again! How naïve to have supposed that her natural functions would atrophy, once she got a boy! Fertility was a gift from both sides of the house—how could she escape it? She dared not admit to herself that she would like to escape it: a Christian woman did her duty as a wife. But all that again!

Mr. Brontë was a little nettled by the promptness of the consequences of his devotion; but hardly disgruntled. He dismissed the matter; being hard at work on *The Maid of Killarney; or, Albion and Flora: a Modern Tale; in which are interwoven some cursory remarks on Religion and Politics*; and busy, also, with walks to Swill Hill and the top of Allerton, with the Firths and his sister-in-law Elizabeth Branwell from Penzance; and innumerable calls and counter-calls; and cup after cup of strong hot tea.

At last Miss Elizabeth Branwell terminated her visit with tears and many kisses; and a great silence fell, broken only by children's cries, and the clinking of tea-cups. "We observed a beautiful eclipse of the sun," Miss Firth wrote in November 1816 in her diary; "the sky was very clear till it arrived at its greatest obscurity; it was afterwards enveloped in clouds—a great gloom." A year later she noted a rare event: "The ever to be lamented Princess Charlotte

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 28–29.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 24–27.

was interred. Service in all places of worship." But nothing—nothing dammed up the floods of tea. "Drank tea at the Brontes'." "Mr. Bronte to tea." "Mr. and Mrs. Bronte drank tea here." "Tea at Mr. Bronte's." <sup>1</sup>

Then on February 12, 1818: "Expected Mr. Bronte to tea, but Mrs. B. was poorly." Poor harassed Mrs. B.! Nancy Garrs was a fair servant for having been hired at twelve years old, but there were four children to be washed, fed, dressed, kept quiet for Papa's sake, and amused. The threat of a fifth hung over the house like a pall. On April 16 Miss Firth noted conscientiously: "Mr. and Mrs. Bronte took tea here." Then for a while she refrained from tea, in company; and on July 30, uncelebrated, Emily Jane Bronte opened her eyes on the world.

Emily. . . . Both Mr. and Mrs. Bronte had a sister Jane; but there is no record of an Emily among the Brontes in Down or the Branwells in Cornwall. This child had come on her own, after there was any need of coming. She was unrequested and unknown. Three weeks from the day of her birth, on August 20, she was baptized with clear water by the Reverend William Morgan at Thornton Church.<sup>2</sup>

Only a few more entries in Miss Firth's faithful if scant diary are solid ground in all that wash of tea. On October 4 she recorded: "The little Brontes called." Grave Maria, six years old, probably helped Nancy herd them in. Elizabeth was five, Charlotte three and a half, Branwell a little over two, and Emily, bringing up the rear, one year and two months. She must have been just walking and beginning to talk.

Then on January 17, 1820, Miss Firth wrote: "Anne Bronte born. The other children spent the day here." Kipping House was then and is still a fine seventeenth-century structure with low ceilings and hospitable fireplaces. Emily, now a year and a half, looked with surprise out of her large grey-blue eyes.

Mrs. Bronte's relief at getting rid of her other offspring the day of her ordeal can be conjectured. Perhaps she was more resigned at the birth of Anne than Emily, having perceived that these matters were not ordered by logic—yet were strictly logical: that a boy was no talisman against further sisters; indeed that sisters were likely to keep coming as long as she had strength enough to bear them.

On February 25, as careful Miss Firth noted, Mr. Bronte

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 36-45.

<sup>2</sup> Thornton Baptismal Registry.

was licensed to Haworth. On March 3 the Firths entertained Mr. and Mrs. Brontë at dinner, and doubtless mixed sorrow with the meat course and vegetables. Whatever his later disposition, at Thornton Mr. Brontë had by geniality won all hearts; as Mrs. Brontë, with a wise mind and gentle sensibilities. No more would they drink tea, no more the friendly minister dash over to Kipping House for breakfast. Perhaps with dessert they talked, too, about the unrest of mill-workers, for on March 31 the Firths sat up behind new-barred windows expecting the radicals, being frightened almost to death by Mr. Brontë, who, having seen the Irish rebellion, prophesied dire events. At any rate on April 5 Miss Firth "took leave of Mr. Brontë before leaving home." When she returned from Scarborough May 2 the Brontës had gone. Therefore they moved to Haworth after April 5 and before May 2—probably in the middle of April, when green patched the hills and a few leaves and flowers were timidly putting forth.<sup>1</sup>

One can imagine the conversations between husband and wife before this momentous change was finally resolved upon. "Haworth is a perpetual curacy," Mr. Brontë must have explained since it was pertinent; "a chapel-of-ease to Bradford Parish Church." "So is Thornton"—that was no advantage. "Haworth is a healthier environment and you are so delicate, my dear. . . ." "But the Firths, Patrick—Miss Outhwaite, Mrs. Kays, Jane and William, Mr. Horsfall, Mrs. John Ibbotson, Mr. Webster . . . !" "Haworth is only six miles away, my dear. Why speak as if it were a hundred? Six miles is a short distance, walking, and no distance at all in a gig." But Maria had suffered to leave Hartshead, scene of their first married years; and now, though Thornton was less attractive, suffered still more. Was it because she was getting older—thirty-seven?

Patrick was as disturbed over the prospect as Maria, but opposition, even faint, hardened him. "You feel that way," no doubt he said, "because you haven't recovered from the birth of Anne. In a month or so, I promise you . . ." Maria pressed her hand to her breast. "Are there any gentlefolk in Haworth?" "There are good people everywhere." Her answer was a sigh. Then Mr. Brontë may have dealt a master-stroke: "What if the Lord sends us more children? The Haworth house is better made and more commodious."

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 44, 45.

Maria was not naturally a rebel. She had told Patrick before marriage that "to be a helpmeet to him would at all times be the care and study of her life," and kept her word eight years. Strange that having deferred so long she should have doubts about deferring now.

But Haworth . . . it was more desolate than Thornton, being as full of worsted mills as the surrounding moors of stone quarries. One had to go four miles to Keighley, not only for a doctor or lawyer, but for clothes, books, dainties, and stationery.<sup>1</sup> The bleak Haworth hill went up like a coal-shaft. The winds hit the trees with such force they were all stunted. Wild moors; pasture-land criss-crossed by stone dykes instead of green hedges; and in summer crops of pale poor oats.

She had read that in ancient times Haworth was an oratory or field-kirk; and that in the eighteenth century the godly, famous, ferocious Rev. William Grimshaw, assigning the longest psalm he could think of, the 119th, had stalked out of the pulpit—the very one offered her husband—to horsewhip loiterers at the Black Bull into Church.<sup>2</sup>

Then that shocking affair about Mr. Redhead. On the death of Mr. Charnock, incumbent of Haworth, Mr. Heap, Vicar of Bradford, had sent Mr. Bronte over; but Haworth had refused to receive him, not on personal grounds, but because they imagined that the trustees who handled the funds had been unjustly deprived of the right of election; whereupon Mr. Bronte had withdrawn, saying his ministry would be useless if not approved by the parish; and Mr. Heap had sent Mr. Redhead.

The first Sunday he preached the Church was jammed with people wearing wooden clogs, and while he was reading the second lesson the whole congregation clattered out, leaving him and the clerk alone. The next Sunday, at the same point in the service, a man facing the tail astride an ass, with a stack of old hats piled on his head, prodded his uncouth steed around the aisles amid screams of laughter. The third Sunday, as Mr. Redhead proceeded bravely and obstinately, a solemnly-drunk chimney-sweep, placed in front of the reading-desk, blinked and nodded at each holy word; and at last, egged on by the surly audience, staggered up the steps and embraced Mr. Redhead; so that pandemonium broke loose. Trying to shake off his perse-

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 48.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 24, 26, 27.



cutor Mr. Redhead dashed out, and in the churchyard both fell where soot-bags had been emptied. By the time the panting clergyman dodged into the Black Bull Inn and shot the bolts, the mob was roaring a threat to stone him. Sneaking out the back door, he struck spurs and fled down the turnpike. The citizens liked Mr. Redhead, they explained later, but were forced to protect their rights.<sup>1</sup> Ah—a tigerish, inhuman, haughty crew . . . that was what the people of Haworth were.

Mrs. Brontë felt as if invited to settle among demons. That the Vicar had consented to relinquish his ancient prerogative, and that the trustees, admiring Mr. Brontë's demonstrated delicacy, had in a gust of amiability chosen the Vicar's original designee, did not alter her opinion. A savage, hard, disdainful race. . . .

Mrs. Brontë's memories of Penzance rose in her like an accusing sickness: the warm southern air, bright and fluent. All very well for Patrick to press deeper into the gloom of Yorkshire—he had been born in northern Ireland and was kin to bleakness. Had he not declared, even in Essex, that he would *like* to live in Yorkshire? <sup>2</sup> But the monotonous landscape wearied the eyes of one born and for twenty-nine years bred to the flickering brilliance of the opulent south. The smoky dim lightless air of Yorkshire recalled painfully, by contrast, clear Cornish heavens; and harsh voices reminded her that voices can be soft.

Ah, heresy! Was it not a wife's duty to obey her husband? "Whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people shall be my people . . ." She looked at the gold band on the fourth finger of her left hand.

"But *another* uprooting, Patrick!" she said (or words to the same effect), trying as always to be cheerful.

"This will be the end."

"No more movings?"

"No, the last."

"The *very* last?" It would be something to have this assurance.

"I said the last."

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 28-31.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 61.

### III

#### MRS. BRONTË'S BRIEF JOY

BUT the children were happy in Haworth.

In Thornton they had had themselves to play with, and here, unreduced, they had themselves. And more. The rooms seemed vast precincts the exploration of which meant, every day, new marvels. Mamma had had window-seats built, and when you sat on them, on bright days, the sun bathed your head. On dismal days—there were lots of them—the wind made odd and interesting sounds—howling, whistling, whining and whimpering like a baby; wuthering. But it was warm in the kitchen where Nancy Garrs cooked dinner, now that her sister Sarah had come from Bradford to act as nurse. And in the box-room upstairs, now designated the children's study, they could play games and even, if they shut the door tight, make noises. One day the cherry tree in the back yard burst into a lace of white flowers. It was so wonderful they could only stand and stare as if hit in the chest, with the breath knocked out of them. No, not for anything would they have returned to Thornton.

What the concept of infinity means to an adult, the moors which swept almost up to the back door meant to those children. When grown Charlotte was to speak of "the consecration of its loneliness." They had only to push an iron turnstile, cross an open meadow scarred by quarries, another turnstile, and they were in that bare enchanting country. Sometimes Nancy and Sarah Garrs escorted them, five in a row, tightly holding hands; and sometimes Papa, though Papa was usually very busy reading or writing in his study; and on special occasions, Mamma. It was utterly quiet: only the moorcock wheeled and lapwing cried; and once in a while an eagle stooped from a great height, in search of food for its young.<sup>1</sup> The moors were always changing: their aspect depended on weather and the time of day: in the morning wet with dew, and dim and far; at noon the sun searched out fragile fern among wastes of furze, and the shadows of clouds moved majestically on the hills; at evening, in the distance, the slopes turned quite blue: a rich fine colour not unlike that of spring bluebells.

As the summer advanced purple heather spread like a carpet: tiny bell-like flowers huddled along curved stems,

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 52.

and though delicate, defied the wind that would strip them, outwitting it by the simple expedient of matting itself and clinging close to the ground.

Emily loved the heather so much, her love must have had roots in this period when she tagged along after her brother and older sisters, trying with shorter legs to keep up with them. Did her mother notice that she was different from the others? It is surprising at how young an age a human being displays individual and ineradicable characteristics. Emily was more loath to come indoors than the other children; and in her fancies bolder. Very early she showed streaks of wildness; being suddenly, at her sweetest, as stubborn as a mulcolt. But she was a little creature who longed to give and to receive affection. Strange—she did not appear to be a Brontë, a Branwell, nor a Carne. Mrs. Brontë wondered about the McClorlys, of whom she knew next to nothing—Patrick seemed to wish to forget Ireland. Nevertheless it was Irish of Emily to have dark curling hair and grey-blue eyes. Sometimes the mother was frightened of those eyes, they looked out at her so unchildlike.

Mrs. Brontë, being of a naturally cheerful disposition, was happier at Haworth than anticipated. She did not know her destiny, and so did not dream that these first nine months in Haworth were in the nature of a reprieve—a temporary suspension of the execution of a sentence.

Mr. Brontë did not tamper with the self-sufficiency of the natives of the West Riding. Treasuring his own right to privacy, he conceded theirs. If parishioners sent for him, he went gladly; if they asked a service, complied with alacrity; but he and his family “kept themselves very close”;<sup>1</sup> with the result that Haworth, the naturally suspicious, was sullenly grateful to him for not being a Mr. Redhead. He wrote his old friend Mr. Buckworth: “When I first came to this place, though the angry winds which had been previously excited were hushed, the troubled sea was still agitated, and the vessel required a cautious and steady hand at the helm. I have generally succeeded pretty well in seasons of difficulty; but all the prudence and skill I could exercise would have availed me nothing had it not been for help *from above*. I looked to the Lord and he controlled the storm and levelled the waves and brought my vessel safe into the harbour.”

Her husband's *laissez-faire* policy happily exempted Mrs.

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 49.

Brontë from parochial duties. Her two servants were young, so that, besides household chores, she had many buttons to sew back on, stockings to mend, and, with cold weather, wool undergarments to contrive.

It was autumn; Michaelmas had passed; frost, biting the heather, had turned it brown; leaves dropped off the straggling currant bushes in the front yard on to the ground. Mr. Grimshaw's crumbling, castellated tower, of 1755, the oldest part of the Church, was dark with rain. Mrs. Brontë sat by the fire in the living-room. But she did not put her feet on the fender: that would have been unladylike.

Patrick said Haworth was healthier than Thornton. Perhaps the air was better; but was it healthy to live with a graveyard on two sides of you? What corruption lay underground and ran and seeped with the rains! Her husband's suggestion that they drain the village impressed the men no more than his indignant request that there be no more drying of linen on the tombstones impressed the women: they weren't going to put their money underground. But in one respect those at the Parsonage were luckier than the other 4658 inhabitants of Haworth: they lived at the hill's summit, with only clean moors above. What a miracle that anyone who lived below the graves kept from dying young! Yet there was James Murgatroyd ninety-five years old; and they said his mother lived to be eighty-six and his father eighty-eight.<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Brontë looked into the peat-fire, where coals lay hot-red at the heart before they dimmed and flaked and fell, coating over with white ash.

She had been terribly in love with her husband when she married him, and still was. In some respects, with his hasty temper, he was peculiar and difficult; but not unkind.

One day when she had put on a buff print gown made by her seamstress in the new fashion of long waists and enormous balloon sleeves, he had good-humouredly bantered her at dinner, and when she laid it aside, slipping into the bedroom, cut off the sleeves. She had laughed as she showed it to Nancy in the kitchen. "Look, Nancy, look what master has done! Never mind, it will do for you." But Patrick had gone to Keighley for silk for a new gown less wonderful and fearful.<sup>2</sup>

With all his Irish passion Patrick kept it fairly well controlled, so that churchwardens who came across the hills to drink a cup of tea with him, and villagers and servants and

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 56, Note.

<sup>2</sup> Gaskell, 53, 54, Notes.

children, scarcely guessed its existence. Maria was proud of his wisdom—he was reading or writing something all the time; and of his dignity as he walked from the vestry to the pulpit, head up, in a white surplice. She was even getting philosophical about the shooting. Every night, loading his pistol, he stored it with his gold watch on the table beside him, in readiness for a burglar or madman; and in the morning fired bullets out the window toward the Church, or out the back door, to keep the barrel primed. She suspected that his motives were mixed: that he really enjoyed the sudden violent ripping of the air which made her start and shrink back into herself. But that was Patrick; that was the man she loved.<sup>1</sup>

His staying to himself she admired, for it seemed to her that this voluntary isolation, so different from his Thornton sociability, signified a mind grown conscious of its superiority. What could Patrick Brontë have in common with mill workers, worsted spinners, and the weavers of stuffs? (She had forgot, if ever she had known, that Patrick was once a hand-loom weaver himself.) The closed door of his study was a symbol of his importance. She tiptoed and taught the children to tiptoe on the uncovered stone.

Patrick was a great walker, striding away across the moors like a somnambulist, yet noting every weather-sign, every wild creature scurrying to cover, every tuft of bracken or bent. Sometimes she accompanied him, but not far. Since the chapelry of Haworth embraced the hamlets of Stanbury and Near and Far Oxenhope and the wapentake (an ancient division of certain Anglian Counties) of Morley, his long legs struck out south to Oxenhope or west to Stanbury, quickly traversing the mile and a half to either point—a man lonely as the sweeping hills.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond Stanbury stood Ponden Hall, home of Robert Heaton and his brothers, gentry who, like the rest of their kind in roomy, bleak, antiquated houses, kept grimly to themselves.<sup>3</sup> Coal-beds and mountain streams had led inevitably to manufacturing, an interruption to the leisurely life which had been lived in those manor houses often since the days of the Tudors. The old yeomanry of small squires

<sup>1</sup> *Heckmondwike Herald and Courier*, September 22, 1822. Mr. Brontë's alleged burning of the children's coloured boots and a hearthrug, and sawing up of chairs for kindling, are omitted because convincingly refuted by Nancy Garrs, who was living in the house at the time.

<sup>2</sup> Gaskell, 52.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 53, Note.

was rapidly becoming extinct. Did Patrick secretly yearn after that proud, idle, unfriendly way of life from which he was shut out? He told his wife stories, hinting about shameful goings-on in gloomy habitations: drinking; eccentric feuds fiercely carried on; soured wilfulness; malignant dogs set on strangers; warped humour; unnatural crimes of men too far from society to feel its moral pressure. She could not understand his pleasure in these dismal themes, which seemed to her merely repelling. How she had shivered on hearing about the bull-baiting at Rochdale, where the bull fastened by a chain to a post in the river, had gored and tossed the dogs and, wheeling suddenly so that its chair swept the savage, delighted, hilarious holiday-makers into the water, drowned them.<sup>1</sup> Poor Mr. Grimshaw had declared war against such heathenish practices—but to what purpose? For a little while the games of Sunday football played with stones had ceased; for a little while the horse-races on the moors above Havorth been abandoned; for a little while the half-naked foot-racers at weddings been called off; for a little while the arvills (funeral feasts) quieted down, the sexton still announcing the celebration from the grave and the mourners still gathering at a private home or public-house to consume cold possets, stewed prunes, cake, and cheese with a draught of wine or, if the hosts were poor and the guests furnishing their own repasts, a spiced roll and the mixture of rum and ale called dog's-nose—but with the mourners chastened and unriotous.<sup>2</sup> For a little while. Then Mr. Grimshaw had died and, during several incumbencies, his sombre flock reverted to its wild state. Did that unregeneracy find an echo in the soul of Patrick? Maria saw growing upon him, not moroseness, but an austerity, a taciturnity, and was herself sobered as by the approach of winter.

One evening, in the sitting-room, she was playing happily with her little boy Patrick Branwell, in the declining light;<sup>3</sup> but soon afterwards was aware of pain. Now, a deep tenderness for a little boy can be a pain—but this was different. She stopped still, holding her breath. It passed—and she said nothing about it to the others.

Christmas brought festivities. There was a special service for St. Michael; and exercises in the Sunday School. By this time Mrs. Brontë had grown somewhat accustomed to poker-faces, and knew how to gauge the emotions of West

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 21.<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 22–26.<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

Ridingers by infinitesimal signs. But her own children laughed outright, and talked incessantly, and played games, and imagined wonders, and ran to her for brooding expressions of love, in a manner most natural. Anne was almost a year old now; a violet-eyed infant who scarcely ever cried. Emily, two and a half, was so lovely a child her mother marvelled. Up, up they went, like steps. When Mrs. Brontë looked at them she thought of all she had been through, and felt tired.

Her illness dated from the 29th of January, 1821. She lay in her bedroom over the sitting-room. The weather was bitter cold; it snowed, sleeted, thawed, and snowed again. The doctor who examined her shook his head and conferred with Patrick in the lower regions of the house. When he departed the front door shut with a bang. She was meek, she took her medicine, but nothing did any good—the pain got worse and worse, a fiendish pain like the gnawing of wolves. A good old woman of Burnley was summoned, to act as nurse. But Patrick, full of tender solicitude, insisted on taking the night nursing himself.

Then (as if there were not trouble enough under that roof) one day—dark and gloomy, overcast by cloud—three of the children came down with scarlet fever, and the next day the other three; and the mother suffered the further anguish of not being able to do anything for those she had brought into the world. She lay on the bed, crying, and saying over and over, "Oh God, my poor children—oh God, my poor children." But later she was silent and seemingly oblivious of what went on around her. Suffering at its greatest pitch is like indifference.<sup>1</sup>

But the children, taking a turn for the better, got well; and her own disease seemed to abate; and Miss Elizabeth Branwell, her older sister, who had visited them in Thornton, arrived with snuff-box and false fringe, to be of what assistance she could.

Nothing could assist. Maria's strength dissolved like the snows; while she looked out her bedroom window at a graveyard as full of tombstones as a mouth is full of teeth.

So time wore on and it was spring. She smelled the difference in the air, and thought of Penzance in Cornwall, far away; of salt gales sweeping in from a new world; of the wharf, and floating green seaweed, and the long-winged

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 58-60; IV, 143; Gaskell, 49, 50.

dusky petrels dwindling and dwindling till lost to sight over the water. . . . She was a bride in Hartshead again. . . . She was a little girl sewing a sampler. "Flee from sin as from a serpent, for if thou comest too near to it, it will bite thee: the teeth thereof are as the teeth of a lion to slay the souls of men."

If something happened to her, she thought when the pain eased, what would happen to her six little children? Maria had the gravity of a grown person. Elizabeth was wise too. . . . And Charlotte, little owl! . . . But Branwell who had a wild streak—what destiny awaited him? And Emily—what would become of the big eyes? Nothing ordinary: those eyes were not ordinary. . . .

It was Thomas à Kempis the German monk who had first said, in his little *Imitation of Christ* so dear to her, the familiar but no less true words, "Man proposes, but God disposes."

That summer if Nancy Garth brought her a dish of red currants from the Parsonage bushes, lying in bed she may have touched them with her fingers. She was ashamed to be such a poor useless wife to Patrick. "Ought I not to be thankful," she said, "that he never gave me an angry word?"<sup>1</sup> But God was her real comfort—she turned unreservedly to God. Christ was her Saviour and heaven, not Haworth Parsonage, her home.

One day Mr. Brontë entered the kitchen in excitement.

"Nancy, is what I've heard true, that you're going to marry a Pat?"

"Yes, Sir, I believe it is," Nancy replied, thinking of Pat Wainwright, "and if he prove but a tenth part as kind a husband to me as you are to Mrs. Brontë, I shall count myself very happy in having made a Pat my choice."<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. Brontë was sorry to see Nancy go, who had lived with them many years, almost like one of the family. But in all things she was patient and cheerful.

A doctor prescribed for the pain, but it cried through the hush of sedatives. She pressed against her nose an odd-shaped smelling-bottle painted with bright flowers.<sup>3</sup>

How quiet the children were for her sake; it brought tears to her eyes.

One day she begged the old woman who nursed her to

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 52.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 51.

<sup>3</sup> Museum.



raise her in the bed that she might see the grate cleaned; saying,

“You do it as it was done in Cornwall.”<sup>1</sup>

She died of cancer on September 15, 1821, and was buried under the floor of Haworth Church.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 50.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 59.

## IV

### CANDIDATES FOR MOTHER

IN after years Charlotte had two or three faint memories of her mother; but Emily none; she was only three when the coffin was carried across the front-patch and through a lych-gate in the wall. Of course an influence unrecorded in mental pictures may be "felt in the blood and felt along the heart." But the three younger children, having seen so little of their mother the last seven months she fought her hopeless battle on the four-poster, little marked and soon forgot the removal to the grave of the body which had borne them.

Mr. Brontë wrote a long letter to Mr. Buckworth:

"Do you ask how I felt under all these circumstances? I would answer to this, that tender sorrow was my daily portion; that oppressive grief sometimes lay heavy on me and that there were seasons when an affectionate, agonizing *something* sickened my whole frame. . . . And when my dear wife was dead and buried and gone, and when I missed her at every corner, and when her memory was hourly revived by the innocent yet distressing prattle of my children, I do assure you, from what I felt, I was happy at the recollection that to sorrow, not as those without hope, was no sin; that our Lord himself had wept over his departed friend, and that he had promised us grace and strength sufficient for such a day. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

The innocent prattling children were much simpler in their acceptance. They had had a mother and she had died. But they must play—they could not help their mother, now, by not playing.

Aunt Branwell went home to Cornwall after her sister's death <sup>2</sup> for the express purpose of preparing her clothes and keepsakes for settling in Yorkshire. A year after Mrs. Brontë's death she was installed in the larger of the two front bedrooms, the one over the living-room, and began her arid sway over her nieces and nephew: a lady quite in the old tradition: small, antique, wearing a formidable cap that would have held twelve of the current fashion, a fringed "front" of light auburn curls, and a silk dress—never any material but silk. She did not like Yorkshire and said so—elaborating, to any who would listen, on the soft warm climate and pleasant round of gaieties in her native town of

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 59.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 59, 68, 69.

Penzance, Cornwall. Whether with naïveté or artfulness, she gave the impression that once she had been a belle—dipping snuff, as she talked, out of a pretty gold snuff-box. Mr. Brontë wrote Mr. Buckworth that she “afforded great comfort to his mind . . . by sharing his labours and sorrows, and behaving as an affectionate mother to his children.”<sup>1</sup>

But whatever his understanding with the good garrulous lady he began, shortly, to beg another lady to supplant her in the seat of authority. This was at least mild treason, for Miss Branwell was ignorant of his manoeuvres.

April 21, 1823, he wrote Mrs. Burder, mother of his old sweetheart Mary Burder at “The Broad,” Wethersfield:

“Dear Madam,—Fourteen years have now gone by since I have either seen you, or heard from you, or from any other of my acquaintance in that part of the country where I spent the first years of my Ministry,”—and related, in slightly pompous style, the events of the intervening years, admitting that he had married “a very amiable and respectable Lady” but hastening to add that she had been dead “nearly two years” (Maria had been dead a year and seven months). “You will much oblige me,” he beat around the Wethersfield bush, “if you will write ere long, and let me know whatever you think will prove interesting. I should like to know whether Miss Davy be still alive, how you are yourself, how all your children are, whether they be married or single, and”—to cover up his tracks—“whether they be doing well, both as it respects this life, and that which is to come. . . .”

Mrs. Burder kept him waiting many weeks before sending the information for which his soul panted.

Whereupon he hastily addressed the maiden though middle-aged Mary Burder of fervent memory. Finchingsfield Park, near Braintree—so she had moved. “Dear Madame,” he wrote, and proceeded to warm up to his subject with a slowness suitable, meet, and fit. But an old passion seized the pen suddenly and rushed it forward: “I experienced a very agreeable sensation in my heart, at this moment, on reflecting that you are *still* single, and am so selfish as to wish you to remain so, even if you would never allow me to see you. *You* were the *first* whose hand I solicited, and no doubt I was the *first* to whom *you* promised to give that hand. . . . However much you may dislike me now, I am sure you

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 111; Gaskell, 58–60.

once loved me with an unaffected innocent love, and I feel confident that after all which you have seen and heard, you cannot doubt my love for you. It is now almost fifteen years since I last saw you. This is a long interval of time and may have affected many changes. It has made me look something older. But, I trust I have gained more than I have lost, I hope I may venture to say I am *wiser* and better. I have found this world to be but vanity"—and more of the like. "However, I trust you possess in your soul a sweet peace and serenity arising from communion with the Holy Spirit, and a well grounded hope of eternal felicity." It then became necessary to break the heavy news of the six children. He advanced warily: "I have a *small* but *sweet* little family that often soothe my heart and afford me pleasure by their endearing little ways, and I have what I consider a competency of the good things of this life. . . . I want," he concluded boldly, "but *one* addition to my comforts, and then I think I should wish for no more on this side eternity. I want to see a dearly Beloved Friend, kind as I *once* saw her, and as *much* disposed to promote my happiness." Shaken by doubt at this point, he gave her the Rev. Mr. Buckworth as reference—"an excellent and respectable man, well known both as an *Author* and an able Minister of the Gospel. . . ." All he asked, he said, was to see her, and of course her mother, at Finchfield Park "as an *Old Friend*"—and kept repeating "*Old Friend*" in a nervous refrain. "I cannot tell how *you* may feel on reading this, but I must say *my* ancient love is rekindled, and I have a *longing* desire to see you. . . ."

There is more than a drop of unctuousness in this letter, trying to slip and slide back into an esteem which, his own anxiety indicates, was not wholly merited; and the frequent underscorings make for an over-emphasis rather womanly and false. Miss Mary Burder, well past forty, was an astute person; she may have had a few wayward and reminiscent longings herself, but she was proud, she had been hurt, she did not relish being second-choice—and was perhaps dubious about that *small* but *sweet* family (little recking the number). Besides, this was the opportunity which for years her rankling soul had coveted.

"Reverend Sir," she addressed him on August 8, "as you must reasonably suppose a letter from you . . . naturally produced in me sensations of surprise and agitation." She could not, she said, well define his motives. "The subject

you have introduced, so long ago buried in silence and till now almost forgotten"—ah, that was her revenge—"cannot I should think produce in your mind anything like satisfaction"—ah, that shaft was meant to go home. She had been reading his letters of 1808, 1809, and 1810, she said. "This review Sir excites in my bosom increased gratitude and thankfulness to that wise, that indulgent Providence"—sic—"which then watched over me for good and withheld me from forming in very early life an indissoluble engagement with one whom I cannot think altogether clear of duplicity. A union with you under then existing circumstances must have embittered my future days. . . . Many communications from you were received in humble silence which ought rather to have met with contempt and indignation, ever considering the sacredness of a promise. Your confidence I have never betrayed, strange as was the disclosure you once made to me; whether those ardent professions of devoted lasting attachment were sincere is now to me a matter of little consequence. 'What I have seen and heard' certainly leads me to conclude very differently. With these my present views of past occurrences is it possible think you that I or my dear Parent could give you a cordial welcome to the Park as an *old friend*? Indeed I must give a *decided* negative to the desired visit. . . ." Nor did she neglect, in this moment of triumph, to mention her handsome competency. "My cup overfloweth," she flung at him; and only at the end could restrain herself at all: "Cherishing no feeling of resentment or animosity, I remain, Rev'd Sir, sincerely your Well-Wisher, Mary D. Burder."

There is no record of how Mr. Brontë took this blow, whether he stood bravely to it or crumpled. The prospect from the grey Parsonage seemed still bleaker after he had read and re-read and folded up that letter; and the children did not afford him quite so much pleasure with their endearing ways. To salve his wounds he did not condescend to answer for five months. But by then he was humble:

"Dear Madam," he wrote, and then no doubt studied for a long time his method of attack, toying with this first-sentence and that, and rejecting many: "In the first place, I wish you the compliments of the season." Yes, that was dignified, that was Christian—so he developed the theme. "Yet, my dear Madam," he expostulated, "I must candidly tell you that many things in that letter surprised and grieved me. I only made a civil request, which I think, and

do verily believe, no one in all England but yourself would have refused to grant me, and not only did you do this but you added many keen sarcasms, which I think might well have been spared, especially as you knew the pale countenance of death was still before my eyes"—ah, that was leaning on Maria!—"and that I stood far more in need of consolation than reproach. I do solemnly assure you that no consideration whatsoever could have induced me to treat you in the same manner—no, nor I trust, anyone living."—That would show her how magnanimous he was, that ought to bring her to her knees and shame her.—"When I had the pleasure of knowing you, you seemed to me (and I shall still believe it) to be considerate, kind and forgiving. . . . I confessed to you that I had done some things which I was sorry for, which originated chiefly in very difficult circumstances that surrounded me, and which were produced chiefly by yourself. This, I think, might have satisfied you; at least, it might have disarmed you of everything like a spirit of hatred, scorn and revenge. However you may hate me *now*—I am sure you *once* loved me—and perhaps, as you may yet find, better than you will ever love another. But did I ever in any one instance take advantage of this or of your youth or inexperience? *You know* I did *not*. . . . The letters which were written in your absence and which I entreat you never more to read, but to burn, were written when my mind was greatly distressed, and the only object of which was to hasten your return. . . . For this, and every other action toward you and yours in which I have been wrong, I ask your pardon. I do not remember what you allude to, but as far as I can recollect from your letter"—liar! he had not destroyed that letter!—"I must have said something highly unbecoming and improper. Whatever it was, as a Christian Minister and a gentleman"—since arriving from Ireland—"I feel myself called upon to acknowledge my great sorrow for it." Then, after a few more remarks, conciliatory, and something less than candid and straightforward, he shot again for the prize: "You distinctly promised (they were nearly the last words I heard you utter), when I last saw you in Weathersfield, that if I called again *you would see me, as a friend*. I, moreover, loved you, and not withstanding your harsh and in some respects cruel treatment of me, I must confess I love you still. . . . I cannot forget our walks from Weathersfield to 'The Broad,' and some of our interviews there. . . . You

may think and write as you please, but I *have not* the *least doubt* that if you had *been mine* you would have been happier than you *now* are, or *can* be as one in *single* life.”—Patrick, after two and a half years of single life, had reason to know, and to speak most bitterly.—“You would have had a *second self*. . . . Our rank in life would have been in every way genteel. . . . Once more let me ask you whether Mrs. Burder and you would object to my calling on you at the Park sometime during next spring or in the summer? If you cannot see me as a friend, surely you can see me without feelings of revenge or hatred and speak to me civilly.” He pressed the point; he was so afraid of being refused irrevocably: “I give you my word of honour, that I will say *nothing* in reference to what is past, unless it should be as agreeable to you as to me. Surely you cannot object to this. It can do *no one living* any harm, and might, I conceive, be productive of some good. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

It is not known what Miss Burder replied. Mr. Brontë may have been permitted to urge his suit at Finchingsfield Park, been inspected and there coldly or reluctantly refused. But it seems probable that the gates of the Park never swung open to his touch. More likely Miss Burder after a protracted and darkly suggestive interval wrote briefly to reiterate her former decision. A woman in a self-righteous mood, she could not have relished sly corrections. Perhaps she replied haughtily that in compliance with his request she had burned his letters; or, formally accepting his apology, appended a stiffly-phrased wish that all correspondence between them cease; or snapped that she could not agree that a meeting between them might be productive of good; or maddened the waiting widower with that most terrible and unanswerable answer, silence, merely silence, leaving the recipient with a faint hope, and then, after a long time, no hope at all.

These letters suggest a mystery. What had been the nature of his “duplicity”? Why, when, where, *how* did he break a promise? A promise of fidelity? What was the “strange disclosure” she kept dark through years of spinsterhood? What were the actions he confessed he was sorry for? Why did he claim that they “originated chiefly in very difficult circumstances that surrounded me, and which were produced chiefly by yourself”? What wild and “highly unbecoming and improper” words filled the letters he wanted

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 60–68.

burned? Their mutual past had an unhealed sore, and he rubbed it, and she rubbed it, and they both, in different ways, cried out in reminiscent pain. The hurt was the same as had caused him to send her, years before, a profile of himself on which he had written, "Mary, you have torn the heart; spare the face."<sup>1</sup>

But since Mary Burder refused the nomination for mother to the Brontë children (to marry, a year later, a nonconformist minister, Mr. Silree), why should a biographer study this lost correspondence? Because it not only reveals an important episode in their father's life, which shrivelled his emotions for the rest of his days, as a hot blast blisters healthy tissue; but demonstrates his character as a young man and, later, as a widower. Given his faults during those two periods, his faults during the space between and the years which followed are deducible. A man can change, but not fundamentally; he can improve, but only so fast.

The idea that Mr. Brontë courted Miss Burder for the sole unselfish purpose of procuring a mother for his six small children is not borne out by the letters. Patrick Brontë himself was all too deeply involved. It is hard for a passionate man known for gallant amorousness in his youth to live severely alone.

The story goes that after being refused by Miss Burder, he proposed to Miss Elizabeth Firth; who also refused.<sup>2</sup>

Those ladies comprised his repertoire. There was nothing for him now but to resign himself; to accept his sister-in-law's limited comfort, for better or for worse. It was not so bad as it might have been. On £50 a year she was independent. She read aloud to him summer afternoons and winter evenings; when the household met for tea they were often in the midst of a verbal tilt on politics or religion. She was not profound, but had character and was lively and intelligent: not pious Mary Burder, not sweet Elizabeth Firth—but, as a substitute, bearable.<sup>3</sup>

But it is doubtful whether Aunt's motherhood by proxy was ever a great success. She was an old maid, late in life mustered into an uncongenial job. The Branwells were not deficient in a sense of duty, and it is to be supposed that she discharged hers conscientiously. But not joyously: that is a different thing. Three-year-old Anne was her pet, sleeping in the large bedroom with her, perhaps on a cot. If she was

<sup>1</sup> Birrell, 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 68.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 111, 112; Gaskell, 60, 61.



called Aunt Elizabeth there is no record; she was always Aunt Branwell, or plain Aunt. Against the weather she had a chronic grudge—for when it wasn't snowing, wasn't it raining? Shrinking from the cold damp which rose from the paving-flags, she clumped up and down the stairs in wooden pattens. Mr. Brontë, because of dyspepsia or unsociability or both, took his meals, except breakfast, alone in his study, and Aunt in her bedroom began to imitate him. The death-bed scene of her sister Maria rose often before her eyes, taming her rebellion against bleak Yorkshire. Her lot was not enviable: it is a severe hardship to change, entirely, one's environment and way of life when well past forty, so that there was not a little heroism in this plump lady of enormous headgear, stilted on pattens. She taught her nieces how to run a fine seam, and hem straight, shirr, and embroider; and Emily, like her sisters, made the inevitable cross-stitch sampler—which quotes Proverbs xxx, 1-9, Psalms cxlv, 8 and 9, and a verse from a hymn:

Ye saints on earth, ascribe with heaven's high host  
 Glory and honour to the one in three ;  
 To God, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost,  
 As was, and is, and evermore shall be ;

but which lay unfinished, in spite of Aunt's exhortations, till March 1, 1829.<sup>1</sup> In her heart, being human, Aunt craved the love of her protégés; but she had not borne them, her connection with them was remote and tardy, and though they esteemed her highly and loved her after a fashion, not being insensible of her quaint devotion, their affection was contained. As a mother she was a good spinster-aunt.

Maria, aged ten, was the true mother. Careless and untidy in her physical habits, she possessed a mind preternaturally mature, serene and wise, and a heart marvellously loving. During the year and seven months of Mrs. Brontë's illness and the hiatus before Aunt's return, she, as the eldest, had grown accustomed to responsibility, being leaned on as well as eagerly and tenaciously loved by her sisters and brother. She sang songs to them and told them stories; and, shutting herself up with a newspaper, emerged an authority on parliamentary debates: a little savant with whom Mr. Brontë discussed the leading topics of the day without feeling any

<sup>1</sup> For a photograph of this sampler, see *The Woman at Home*, August, 1897.

necessity to talk down.<sup>1</sup> Moreover she was deeply religious, with a faith simple and absolute; and sensitive. Then, since only the sensitive can understand sensitivity, there was from the beginning a strong bond between Maria, ten, and Emily, five. In the evening when hearts reach out blindly for spontaneous affection the little mother often reassured the spirited little girl with blue but greying eyes.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 50, 59.

*Life and Letters*, I, 91.

## V

### EMILY'S CHILDHOOD

THE period between her mother's death, when she was three years and one month, and her departure for school, at six years and three months, was Emily's only real childhood. It followed hard on an unfavoured infancy; was ushered in by a mournful event; lasted a bare three years, and was terminated by an experience of horror. Yet during it she was happy in the care-free way of those who have never been unhappy and have nothing to compare: the sun shone; she steeped herself in honeyed time.

The years from three to six are of vast importance. The soul is still mysteriously linked with a spiritual world and has an implicit knowledge that it "cometh from afar." Whatever happens to it then impresses an unblemished consciousness, leaving a mark as clear and emphatic as the foot of a bird on new-fallen snow.

Life in Haworth was neither mean nor boring to the child Emily.<sup>1</sup> To her the village was large. Every now and then a stranger came to the door to see Papa on business. The postman brought the *Leeds Intelligencer* which Maria read aloud and which she was just beginning to make out words in, herself. On Sundays the sweet bells of Haworth Church rang so close they shivered the walls of the Parsonage. The children had to sit very still in Sunday School; but there were rewards: stories in the box-room upstairs, and walks on the moors. At bed-time Papa held family prayers in his study, where a pleasant wood-fire crackled in the fireplace, and you didn't have to listen to the Bible if you didn't want to—only look as if you did.

While still very young Emily and her sisters and brother invented and acted little plays of their own, in which the Duke of Wellington, from Papa's newspapers, played a leading rôle.<sup>2</sup> Thus at the dawn of individual consciousness the habit of hero worship, with its ennobling effect, fastened on her. The children argued like sages about the comparative merits of Napoleon, Hannibal and Cæsar. Sometimes a fight ensued and Papa had to be called in as arbitrator. He was amazed at the natural talents of his precocious off-

<sup>1</sup> As Branwell was to remark when a man, "childhood has a strong faculty of admiration, but a very weak one of criticism." (*Life and Letters*, I, 212.)

<sup>2</sup> Gaskell, 58.

spring; and, curious to plumb them, hit upon an ingenious scheme to rid them of timidity. Taking a mask which happened to be in the house he commanded them to wear it, one by one, and to answer his questions boldly from behind that parapet.

He asked Anne what a child like her most wanted.

"Age and experience."

He asked Branwell, adored son and brother, what was the best way of knowing the difference between the intellects of man and woman.

"By considering the difference between them as to their bodies," said Branwell unabashed.

It is interesting to speculate how Mr. Brontë would have answered that question himself.

Of Charlotte he inquired what was the best book in the world and she, primed by himself, answered:

"The Bible."

"What is the next best?"

"The book of Nature."

He asked Elizabeth what was the best mode of education for a woman. She did not hesitate, having often heard Aunt Branwell on the subject:

"That which will make her rule her house well."

He questioned Maria as to the best way to spend one's time. Said Maria gently:

"By laying it out in preparation for a happy eternity"—and the Rev. Brontë was deeply impressed.

Only Emily's answer, issuing oracle-like from behind the kind mask, had a tone of fierceness.

Branwell had been naughty lately, so Mr. Brontë asked Emily what he had best do with the boy.

"Reason with him, and when he won't listen to reason," said Emily, "whip him."

That answer gave Mr. Brontë pause. How practical it was, how fair, yet how uncompromising! It recognized that the mind was of first importance in punishment as in pleasure, but the body not negligible. She had a mind and a will of her own, that little girl Emily. He could not quite make her out.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Brontë gave his children regular instruction in his study. He was interesting, because well-informed, to children intellectually curious; but stern and unrelenting, as if dealing with Cambridge students, when they made slips.

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 58, 59.

It is not known how he punished. With a birch rod? The birch rod was in excellent repute, those days. It was usually applied to the hands of girls, but boys got it on a rear and more central part. Mr. Brontë would have found it difficult always to punish for the good of the culprit and never in anger as a means of revenge; for he was a passionate man, of great emotional excitability, irascible if opposed in his ruling: not cruel, but in his household an absolute monarch who scorned to delegate his powers.

It has been suggested <sup>1</sup> that in her childhood, before she went off to school, Emily was punished in a way which had a profound and terrible influence on her later life. It may well be; some of the allusions in her poetry and the scene in the late Mr. Reed's bedroom in *Jane Eyre* do strangely cohere. Did unimaginative Aunt Branwell shut Emily up one winter evening in the room in which Mrs. Brontë had died, and, as the gloom deepened, did a torch carried by someone crossing the graveyard suddenly cast bright moving beams through the uncurtained window, so that Emily shrieked and fell in a kind of fit? And did Maria the elder sister, the little mother, run to her and soothe her, so that Emily, emerging from unconsciousness, saw a tender ministering angel? And did such a symbol of the possibility of nightmare being beautifully reversed, at its darkest, haunt all her days? It is a workable hypothesis. But a fit need not be invented to account for an unforgettable experience of horror and rescue.

Cowan Bridge will account for that.

But Cowan Bridge was not yet. There was still the spring; she was almost six and the cherry tree in the backyard stood garlanded with snowy bloom; still the fun of having not a care in the world, and coming in hungry from walking or from running wild in games, to a steaming dinner, over which Aunt Branwell fussily presided, of plain food but enough of it: a single joint, potatoes or some other vegetable, usually a milk-and-rice pudding and, to make up for restrictions on butter, Yorkshire spicecake from drippings; and sometimes, even, tripe, which was greatly favoured; nor was pie unknown.<sup>2</sup> Each had a bead serviette ring an inch wide.<sup>3</sup> There were still wonderful sessions with fifty-odd-

<sup>1</sup> Wilson, 27-31; *Jane Eyre*, Chap. II; and Emily's poem beginning, "Come hither, child; who gifted thee."

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 56; III, 170.

<sup>3</sup> Museum.

year-old Tabitha Aykroyd, a village woman who had come to take Nancy Garr's place when Nancy married Pat Wainwright: Tabby with a head full of rough tales of the moors, told in broad Yorkshire. Still the excitement of seeing currants, actual currants, break out on their own bushes; still the moors, unconfined and glorious—before Emily had any sinister memory plaguing the conscious or unconscious mind.

The moors were her spiritual home. Even before she was articulate in poetry, she was aware of that incontrovertible truth, in secret centres of response, the nerves, the bloodstream. Just to loose her eyes out across them was happiness. How far they rolled! If she walked long enough, the houses of Haworth were swallowed up, and only a bare waste of earth and sky remained; but that was sufficient—that was a universe. In spring, very slowly the earth greened over with coarse long grass; in summer everything was purple heather, the spiny crouching flower laden with bells; by late September, frost-tipped and tawny; in winter, brown, vast, desolate and, in a new way, beautiful. Winds whistled, wild hawks swooped; and then the snows fell, and the hills were bosomed more deeply than ever in silence. Emily knew the moors in all weathers and all innuendos of light. Six is not too young for a child to have definite predilections, and the Brontë children were precocious—especially Emily. The moors spoke to her of the unspeakable. She felt what she was, and knew what she loved.

The six children walked on the moors hand in hand, a row of steps: the girls in capes and bonnets, and Branwell in a peaked cap drawn down over red-curling hair. Thrown on each other's exclusive society, the bond between them was iron-strong. The shy quietness which the old woman who nursed Mrs. Brontë had taken for spiritlessness,<sup>1</sup> on the moors fell from them completely, so that Sarah Garrs often despaired of controlling them, rounding them up, and getting them back to the Parsonage safe and on time.

The path over Stillingworth Moor, going due west, reaches its highest point about a mile from Haworth, from which the surrounding country may be seen in vast panorama. Veer slightly left, and the path joins and follows Sladen Beck, where hair-grass grows longer because better watered and the trees stand taller. From the path leading to the old

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 50.

house called The Withins, are visible the waterfall of Sladen Beck and, half-way up, a birch tree and mountain ash. Or hew to an undeviating path, straight west, and come to the lonely wooded valley washed by Ponden Beck; and then the hamlet of Stanbury, over which Mr. Brontë had clerical jurisdiction; and then Ponden Hall, the ancient domicile of the Heatons, low among trees.

It was in the valley of Ponden Beck that Branwell, Emily and Anne were walking with Sarah Garrs the fateful afternoon of September 2, 1824—Maria and Elizabeth having been sent to the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge in July, and Charlotte in August. Strange that Sarah led the young ones more than a mile from home, when they were not long recovered from whooping-cough and measles, and still rather debilitated. Emily, exceedingly fond of five-year-old Anne, walked by her side. Branwell pranced ahead, cutting capers and performing all manner of antics, and then, when tired, trotted along submissively, like any exuberant boy of seven. They mentioned the oddness of Maria, Elizabeth and Charlotte being off at school—it was their first bitter taste of separation.

The afternoon was very still; unnaturally so. Sarah spoke of turning back, but the children begged to go on. A wind sprang up. Dust and stubble were driven before it weak and unavailing. Haze swam in the valley of Crimsworth Dene; while the cornfields were wildly agitated. How dark the disc of the sun!—coppery and strange, as if in eclipse. Over by Ponden Kirk the moors were black with rain, and thunder rumbled. Oh, they must go home! Sarah said. What was that roaring?—that sound as if the earth were breaking up? No, they couldn't get home, they were caught! Sarah rushed her charges into the nearest farm-house.

This was no ordinary storm. Thunder rolling, lightning forking, rain falling in sheets were ordinary enough; but that dull tremendous rumble, what could it mean? Farmers, stiffening with fear, roused and dashed out of doors to rescue sheep and cattle. The west was collapsing; the everlasting hills, which they had felt they could trust if they could trust anything in this world, were uprooted, were sliding, were crumbling into Ponden Valley—to the spectators it was supernatural. The great bog on the summit of Crow Hill above Ponden Kirk had burst, and an avalanche of what resembled black lava full of rocks was overwhelming the hamlet of Ponden, breaking walls and bridges, levelling

trees, piling boulders in fantastic places, and burying corn-fields to a depth of seven feet.

At the Parsonage Miss Branwell and Mr. Brontë craned out an upstairs back-window, toward the heavens' sullen threat and audible destruction. Where were the children? The window-frames rattled. Was this an earthquake? Surely a visitation from the Lord: retribution and judgment, thought Mr. Brontë and Miss Branwell, seriously frightened.<sup>1</sup>

But six-year-old Emily, standing among the crouching and aghast, was frightened not at all. With her temperament she felt throes of joy at such a display of natural power. The elements were her friends—let them rage. Why was Anne so white? But wonder dilated her grey-blue eyes: she breathed deep and fast as she watched the storm through that farm-kitchen window, feeling a zest, which was prophecy, for disaster. She felt cataclysmic things mystically, which later would be, to some extent, rationalized, but which would always, in essence, remain mystic—beyond the poor explanations of speech.

<sup>1</sup> "A Sermon preached in the Church of Haworth, on Sunday, the 12th day of September, 1824, in reference to an Earthquake, and Extraordinary Eruption of Mud and Water, that had taken place ten days before, in the Moors of that Chapelry." By the Rev. P. Brontë.



## VI

### COWAN BRIDGE

COWAN BRIDGE was a fell experience. It lasted only six months, but it warped Emily's childhood; when she emerged the universe had changed.

On the 26th of November, month of fog and black frosts, Emily was hoisted on to the coach at Keighley, put under the special care of a tipped guard, and unloaded bag and baggage at the stage-stop in front of the Clergy Daughters' School in Lancashire. It had been a bleak journey. The landscape rendered up no colour; all was drab, dun, dark brown and swarthy. The stone houses huddled sullen in their dells, the strings of stone dykes were monotonous, and the coach, like every coach, rattled and swayed and bumped in the ruts, showing no consideration whatsoever. The day had seemed unconscionably long. They passed Giggleswick, Engleton, and Inglesborough Hill; at Leeds the horses were unhitched from the shafts, and the passengers jostled into the White Horse Inn to dine; but Emily could eat nothing. Again she was shut into the coach and bowled along at breakneck speed, and dusk fell, obscuring unfamiliar hills, and they plunged down a dark wooded valley as the wind rose, and now all was inky black through thick window-glass—till someone shouted, "Cowan Bridge!"

The coach door was opened.

By the light of the lamps she saw a servant.

"Is there a little girl named Emily Bronte here?"

Emily answered "Yes"; and was lifted down, cramped from long sitting and bewildered by the sudden cessation of noise and motion. Her small corded trunk or leather case<sup>1</sup> or whatever her clothes were in (perhaps only a box, since the three sisters who had gone ahead exercised first choice on the luggage) was handed down from the top. The door slammed; a voice cried "All right!" A horn sounded hollowly, the four horses were tapped with a whip, and the coach drove on toward Kendal, leaving her behind. The woman spoke some words to her; and she was led through a door in a wall, which was forthwith closed and locked. Emily turned, and caught, by the light of a

<sup>1</sup> Museum.

torch and the light spreading from many windows, her first glimpse of the Clergy Daughters' School.<sup>1</sup>

It was L-shaped, a new building having been joined at right angles to an old bobbin-mill to form two sides (or almost) of a garden-enclosure, the third side being a covered veranda, and the fourth a wall.

Pebbles crunched underfoot, and then as in a dream Emily found herself in a parlour with a fire, and stretched stiff fingers in a gesture of hope. But around pressed the night. The papered walls held its shadows; the carpe, the curtains, the polished mahogany furniture that shone in the flickering light could not deny that darkness waited outside.

Then, walking erect, there entered a tall lady with dark hair, dark eyes, and a pale expansive forehead. She was wrapped in a shawl and looked very serious, but kind. This was Miss Evans, superintendent and head-teacher.<sup>2</sup> She set her candle on a table; and shook her head at the idea of a child so young travelling so far alone.

"Are you tired?"

"A little, ma'am."<sup>3</sup>

"And hungry too?"

"A—little."

Emily felt the constriction in the throat and tickling in the nose which accompany a desire to cry when she saw for the first time the long low study-hall crowded with girls of different ages; and ate for the first time the supper of thin oaten cake shared into pieces; and slept for the first time in a strange bed in the bare dormitory. Perhaps she slept with Charlotte, as perhaps Elizabeth with Maria, since every bed had two occupants. But Charlotte would have been but partial and temporary relief to a sensitive child to whom the very sheets (coarse) felt alien, and the loud rising-bell before dawn an accusation and berating.

The next morning she dressed hurriedly. A frock of brown stuff in outlandish style and a long holland pinafore were the emblems of her new caste. It was dark, and bitter cold, and rushlights were burning in the room, and some seventy girls had popped out of a long row of beds and

<sup>1</sup> *Jane Eyre*, 40, 41. Emily's trip to Cowan Bridge was exactly like Charlotte's. And Charlotte frankly depicted hers in *Jane Eyre*, saying: "Details, situations, which I do not understand and cannot personally inspect, I would not for the world meddle with."

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, IV, 313.

<sup>3</sup> *Jane Eyre*, 43.

were blundering into their clothes.<sup>1</sup> Emily had to wait for a basin, to wash, and ice had to be broken before water could be poured. There was one basin to every six girls, on stands down the middle of the dormitory. Then another bell rang, and they fell into double file and marched downstairs into the dimly-lit schoolroom. Imagine the new pupil's confusion and growing despair. The Crow Hill flood had pleased more than frightened her, for it was her nature to exult in fierce elements. But Crown Bridge was something else: a terror invented and enforced by human beings: not wild liberty, but suppression. The day's Collect was repeated, with Scriptural texts, and then for an hour that battalion of empty girls listened to chapters from the Bible. When at last wan light filtered through the windows, they were marched into the great low-ceiled refectory, to partake of lumpy Scotch porridge that perhaps this day, as certainly some days, was burned; and grease swam on the milk and water.<sup>2</sup>

For the minor hell that was the Clergy Daughters' School during the six months Emily attended, no one is particularly to blame. Its purpose was excellent: to provide at low cost a decent education for the female issue of poor parsons. £15 was the tuition, expenses over and above that sum being met by subscriptions from wealthy patrons or from the pocket of the founder himself, the Rev. William Carus-Wilson. The school had been started under the best auspices; and an approving coterie of pious friends and clerical kin—the Franks, Miss Outhwaite, Mr. Buckworth, Uncle John Fennell and Cousin William Morgan—had abetted Aunt Branwell and Mr. Brontë in their decision to offer up four little girls as living sacrifices (though they put it in other terms). The regular lessons in Aunt's room had not been progressing brilliantly and Papa was busy. Branwell could dash through the graveyard and along the stone wall that led southward to the Sowdens' and over the hill, toward Oxenhope, to the Boys' Grammar School—but where could the girls be properly taught if not at Mr. Carus-Wilson's semi-charitable establishment? £15. Four times £15—£60. Quite cheap—and it covered not only board, lodging and instruction, but clothes.<sup>3</sup> The prospectus promised: "The system of education

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 68; *Jane Eyre*, Chap. V, *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, IV, 299-314.

<sup>3</sup> Rule II, School's 1842 Report; Gaskell, 62.

comprehends history, geography, the use of the globes, grammar, writing and arithmetic, all kinds of needlework, and the nicer kinds of household work, such as getting up fine linen, ironing, etc. If accomplishments are required an additional charge of £3 a year is made for music or drawing, each." What could be better or more reasonable? Mr. Brontë had urged; and repeated, now that the house was inordinately quiet, winter evenings. He did not greatly love children as children, and yet it cannot be doubted that he loved his own flesh and blood. Did he know of the harsh and even shocking conditions at the school? Though he had accompanied Maria and Elizabeth to Cowan Bridge in July and sat at the same table and inspected the classrooms, it cannot be that he was adequately informed—else he would have snatched his daughters home. Mr. Carus-Wilson himself must have been ignorant—else he would have quickly (instead of a year later, on the removal of the school to Casterton, after the Brontë girls had withdrawn) instituted radical reforms.

The Cowan Bridge experience was more gruelling to Emily than to Maria or Elizabeth or Charlotte, not only because of her more home-loving, curb-resenting temperament, but because she was the youngest. "Emily Brontë," read the school register. "Entered November 26, 1824, aged 6¼. Reads very prettily, and works a little." How eloquent with what it leaves out!

Bad health was a gift of the school: a cluster of six or seven cottages picturesquely situated around a bridge over the rock-filled Leek, bordered by alders, willows and hazel bushes, and surrounded by grassy pastures; for though it sat high on a plain above Lune Valley, miasmal vapours made it peculiarly vulnerable to infections. The older, bow-windowed part of the main L-shaped building, once the residence of the Picard family and now the kitchen, dining-room and teachers' rooms, had cold stone floors, small mullioned and latticed windows which stuck, low ceilings and tortuous upper passages, to which smells from the kitchen and damp from the stream and autumn fogs tenaciously clung. The food was poor—but what boarding-school's is not? It was plain and frugal (Mr. Carus-Wilson had started with less than £100 in hand); but no proof has been offered that it was inadequate as sustenance, however offensive in the preparation to those of fastidious taste. The trouble was, the cook had dirty habits, but because

she was in Mr. Wilson's confidence her villainous régime went unchallenged. The oatmeal porridge was sent up mixed with foreign substances. The boiled beef, not having been salted before dressed, was too often tainted. The potato pie was sometimes rancid with steaming fat which gave off an unpleasant odour. The rice pudding with treacle sauce tasted of rain water which had washed up dust lodged on the roof before slithering into an old wooden cask, from whence it was ladled. The milk from unclean cans was what Yorkshire folk call "bingy." On Saturday an unsavoury hash was concocted from the week's scraps in the larder. The oatcake or clap-bread of Westmoreland, the invariable *pièce de résistance* of lunch and tea, was very different from the leavened oatcake of Yorkshire, to which the Brontë children were accustomed, and singularly unpalatable. Is it any wonder that they sometimes refused food while craving-hungry? Then every Sunday the small army of pupils had to march more than two miles to Tunstall Church, across open country swept by bitter winds, and sit in an unheated room through Mr. Wilson's interminable service, that was divided in the middle by time-out for a cold dinner eaten in a barn-like upstairs chamber. Emily had no gradual introduction to this Spartan practice, since she arrived in November, when damp mists had already risen and winds been unleashed. The forlorn procession wound over the bare fields, pausing with faint-hearted interest at the crumbling remains of the old Roman road, and pressing on to cries of "Order!" and "Monitors, keep the lines straight!" from the teacher or teachers in charge. Then the thin-blooded little Brontës, trussed up in hard pews, curled the toes of their icy feet in uniform-shoes, in a feeble and despondent effort to stir their circulations. They wore purple stuff frocks and purple cloth coats and bonnets, and since they had paid £3 extra for "frills," tippetts around their necks and hanging down in front, or long pelisses. When the little Brontës coughed, Miss Evans, the kind head-mistress, may have looked up anxiously at Emily, who was "quite the pet nurseling of the school"—a "darling child."<sup>1</sup> But cruel Miss Andrews, an under-teacher, shot angry eyes at frail Maria. Always coughing! It was the tail-end of the whooping-cough, in spite of which, in July, it had been decided in conference to admit her

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 76.

and Elizabeth. But she was almost eleven—it was ridiculous—why couldn't she control that rasping?

It was part of Emily's ordeal at Cowan Bridge that she had to watch delicate Maria, who had been for three years her conception of a mother and whom she adored, grow wan and stoically languish. The strict routine made it impossible to run and throw her arms around Maria's neck; she had to look upon this dissolution from afar: had to witness painful scenes, like the one in which Maria (model for Helen Burns in *Jane Eyre*) moaned out at the rising-bell that she was so ill, so ill she wished she could stop in bed, but rose in order not to clash with the disciplinarian and, shivering with cold, slowly drew the black-ribbed, worsted stockings up her white legs—till Miss Andrews burst from her private room at the end of the dormitory, seized her by the arm on the side where a blister was not yet healed, and whirled her into the middle of the room, to be made an example of dirtiness and untidiness. Maria did not complain; she never complained. Slow and trembling she descended the stairs at last, and was punished for being late.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Carus-Wilson had good intentions and was sincere, but his God was a God of vengeance. At the time Emily was in school this "black marble clergyman" was storing up incidents and arguments which were used later in a magazine called the *Children's Friend* and in his book *Youthful Memoirs*. He loved to describe the death-bed scenes of little children, like the boy aged three and a half who, when asked whether he chose death or life, replied, "Death for me? I am fonder of death"; and horrible plagues, and the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, much underlined; or naughty children, like one in the *Children's Friend* who "screamed and cried and stamped" and whom, "dreadful to relate, it pleased God to strike dead." Such doctrines were less unusual a hundred years ago than now; but they were extreme even then. Mr. Wilson's *First Tales*, in words of one syllable for infants, bore a picture of a man being hanged, and the book opens: "Look there! Do you see a man hung by his neck?" It was this ecclesiastic and fierce exemplar who, as prime mover and secretary and treasurer as well as one of the twelve trustees of the school, cast the shadow of his rigorous and uncompassionate though perfectly pious and

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 72; *Life and Letters*, II, 150, 174.

conscientious ideas over that weak band of girls, and who countenanced by affinity, if not explicitly, the inhumanities of the under-teacher who persecuted Maria.

Maria had a more remarkable mind than any of the other Brontës, except Emily. Her incorrigible slovenliness and unpunctuality were the abstraction of a mind absorbed in matters large and remote. Such people by composure irritate the superficially composed. The under-teacher harried her like a dog a bone: "Maria, you are standing on the side of your shoe; turn your toes out immediately. . . . Maria, you poke your chin most unpleasantly; draw it in. . . . Maria, I insist on your holding your head up; I will not have you before me in that attitude . . ." and with a switch, for some unintentional misdemeanour, once inflicted a dozen strokes on her bared neck. Maria's meekness was superhuman, Christ-like, for she believed literally in returning good for evil.<sup>1</sup> Dreamy and visionary, she could have been thoroughly understood only by someone dreamy and visionary. It is therefore surprising that undreamy Miss Evans stood like a flaming angel between Maria and her foe. One sees her lifting the shining sword of her benevolence: tall, fair and graceful, with brown eyes and long lashes and a broad pale field of a brow, flanked by clusters of round curls; wearing a dress of purple cloth banded with black velvet in Spanish style, and a gold watch tucked in her girdle: a refined countenance, a grave sweet mien. But Maria's cough could not be stopped by fugitive kindnesses that winter. No doubt Miss Evans grieved to see her slow decline; Elizabeth and Charlotte grieved; but most of all Emily. It was her baptism of pure unadulterate sorrow.

During January and February the snows bedded in, so that the children were forced to spend their hour of play within garden walls. Their clothing was too light; the wind blew under their friezes; they had no goloshes and snow lodged in their shoes and melted, and gloveless hands became first numb and then inflamed and raw and itching. Occasionally Mr. Wilson loomed on the horizon, buttoned up tight and warm in a surtout.

On February 14 Maria left Cowan Bridge. Papa, who had been sent for, was shocked at her appearance, and bundled her without delay into the Keighley coach—the thin arms, the pipe-stem legs, the hollow chest, the sunken

<sup>1</sup> *Jane Eyre*, 55, 61, 73, 87.

grey eyes which yet could smile so brightly that years later those who had known her remembered it. Ravaged by consumption she still had a beauty which depended not upon fine colour nor sweeping eyelash nor perfect features, but the presence of a serene soul.<sup>1</sup> Her school-mates crowded out into the road to see her off, among them Elizabeth and Charlotte and Emily. Miss Evans and probably Elizabeth and perhaps Charlotte knew she would not return; only Emily was too young to understand that the malady was hopeless. But she sensed something ominous. When Maria lifted her foot to get into the vehicle—ah, that moment! Maria the little mother had kissed each of them (consumption was not understood in those days and precautions against contagion were neglected). Good-bye, Maria. Good-bye, Elizabeth. Good-bye, Charlotte. Good-bye, Emily. Oh, Maria, Maria——! A lump closed Emily's throat. But the horses would not wait; they were going. For the second Maria's mild grey eyes were turned full upon her sisters. Then the wheels revolved, she was gone—over the bridge, past the cottages . . . a speck in the distance.<sup>2</sup>

Spring made life at Cowan Bridge much easier. In March the snows began to thaw; in April the small square flower-beds allotted to each girl for cultivation blossomed with snowdrops, crocuses, and sun-coloured daffodils. Windows were left open. Pupils stampeded out of doors with the mercurial joy of childhood. But Emily had Maria often on her mind.

One day a low typhus fever broke out in the school and Mr. Wilson himself was alarmed at the symptoms—skin flushed as by a furnace, nomadic pains, and iron-weighted eyes—for which at this distance it is hard to assign a cause. The pestilential situation of the school? Neglected colds? Semi-starvation? An old laundress whom Mr. Wilson conveyed to the school in a gig because he had faith in her motherly powers, sniffed the air suspiciously—it was fetid, peculiar. Half against her will, for she was afraid of transmitting the infection to her own children, she nursed the stricken. Dr. Batty of Kirkby Lonsdale, arriving in haste to sample the food, spewed it out of his mouth with a remark that it was “unfit for pigs”—and the careless cook was dismissed. The old woman mustered in as nurse was now elevated to housekeeper, and the girls

<sup>1</sup> *Jane Eyre*, 77, 78, 83.

<sup>2</sup> Gaskell, 77.



who could still eat were suddenly astonished to be eating very well. Thus was corrected a signal evil—but too late for some—too late for Maria at home, too late for Elizabeth, who was weakening with something more insidious than typhus. . . .<sup>1</sup>

"To God be the glory," said the Yearly Report.

Often we are permitted to hope before we are permitted to see death. The colours which usher in the night are especially beautiful. Singular brightness precedes decay: it compensates for something still non-existent, while deceiving as to its imminence. . . . Emily and Charlotte were not sick that spring of 1825, and could take advantage of the relaxed discipline; rambling over the greening fields on Thursday-afternoon half-holidays; leaping from rock to pale rock in the now turbulent beck; fishing up little stones, wonderfully rounded and smoothed; examining the sticky uncurling leaves of ash and elm, and prongs of grass which braved the air while still threatened with frost; walking under the washed sky; and when April had matured to May gathering the wild greenish-yellow primroses which lay like tarnished gold coins scattered among tufts of jade-green moss.<sup>2</sup>

But early in May Maria died.<sup>3</sup> It is not likely that this intelligence was withheld from Emily. What weapon could have fitted more neatly into the hand of worthy Mr. Wilson than the lesson-pointing death of a child—not one concocted in his brain, but real? Emily's face, that day, was as white as her tucker. In her father's house she had heard a little about death and here at Cowan Bridge a great deal—but *where was Maria*? The heaven they talked about so glibly was not on the map of the eastern nor western hemisphere. It was not on the big globe in the schoolroom, which noted even the small towns and small mountain ranges and smaller rivers. They *couldn't* put Maria down in a hole—Maria had been kind and gentle; had helped when help was needed; knew all the things in the books. Had she hurried to get them learned because she guessed her life would be short? Maria, come to me; don't leave me, Maria; Miss Evans is nice, but the others aren't nice here—Maria, come back! . . . With such musings Emily must have wetted her pillow at night;

<sup>1</sup> *Jane Eyre*, 73; Gaskell, 73, 74.

<sup>2</sup> *Jane Eyre*, 81.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 69. "She exhibited during her illness many symptoms of a heart under Divine Influence," said Mr. Brontë, of Maria.

they shrivelled the brilliant days as with returning frost. The strangest part was that school went on as if nothing had happened: she had to bend over hard spelling-words, and loop crochet-thread, and weed her garden-patch, warm afternoons. The winter uniforms of purple had been exchanged for brown nankeen with high narrow tuckers around the throat and little bags of holland shaped like Highlander purses tied in front, and lighter-weight stockings, though the same country-made shoes fastened with brass buckles; and for outdoor, straw bonnets with coloured strings. What could the sunshine mean to Emily? or coloured strings? <sup>1</sup>

One day Elizabeth cut her head severely and Miss Evans nursed her for several days in her own bedroom. Did she notice at that time a peculiar transparency of the skin? On May 31 the ten-year-old girl was sent home by the Keighley coach, accompanied by Mrs. Hardacre, a trusted servant of the school. The prophecy which Mr. Brontë saw in Elizabeth's face reminded him too forcibly of Maria, and he departed post-haste to fetch Charlotte and Emily. They were on holiday at The Cove, Silverdale, Mr. Carus-Wilson's house at Morecombe Bay, but, having arrived last night after dark, had only heard, without seeing yet, the sea.<sup>2</sup>

How good to be home! There was Papa, opening his bright-green case<sup>3</sup> to remove his spectacles. There was Aunt with curls bobbing. There was Branwell trying to make out he was something just because he was a boy. How much Anne had grown in six months! But a hush fell on Emily's heart. *Where was Maria?*

Two weeks later, in the middle of glorious June weather, Elizabeth too died of consumption. It seems likely that Emily was allowed to attend the funeral—funerals were considered sad but salutary, even, perhaps especially, for children. Thus literal death, the black airless hole, yawned in front of her for the first time. It had devoured Elizabeth and Maria. What else would it devour?

Now the pure part of Emily's childhood was ended. She was to be happy again, at times ecstatic; but Eden was no more. Henceforth the brightest sunlight would cast a shadow—indeed, the brighter the sun the sharper its melancholy copy.

<sup>1</sup> *Jane Eyre*, 47.

<sup>2</sup> Gaskell, 76, 77; Chadwick, 78.

<sup>3</sup> Museum.

## VII

### “LONG, LONG THOUGHTS”

ONLY after an event has transpired is its full meaning borne in upon the spirit. This is truer of ill than of good fortune. The memory of ill fortune is like a prolongation of rain, which drums, seeps, soaks, but only after a passage of time saturates the whole acre. Emily's understanding of death was imperfect at the time of Maria's death. The seed of terrible consequence had to ripen. It did ripen.

When, then, was the black crop reaped? Not the whole crop, for years; but part of it rather soon. Once the blight was on the leaf, it spread. Early impressions are ineffaceable; and children suffer more than their elders are aware of; and Emily, being emotionally precocious, was emotionally vulnerable; and exposed to attack from within, was more quickly exhausted by attack from without. So instinctively she chose her defence: which was, to live a secret life undiscovered to her sisters and brother. This secret life of suffering cannot be traced by the record of her doings, sayings, drawings or writings; and can only be judged of by the colossal proportions to which it had grown in later years. But a flower—a flower like a huge, dark, symmetrical shadow—is not made all in a moment. It has a long private history: genesis, fecundation, and painful breaking of ground.

When Emily and Charlotte returned from Cowan Bridge on June 1, 1825, Emily was nearly seven years old. Now, it has been recognized since ancient times that even an ordinary child passes a landmark at seven, and becomes a rational being capable of differentiating between good and evil, and other subtle matters. What he will be, he is. That is why Jesuits say, “Give us the child till he is seven, then do with him as you please.” At seven Emily had received sad impressions which could never be erased: the moors bare of pretensions, the hunger and cold of Cowan Bridge, the death of Maria. She was a child of great intensity, generous and loving. She had many needs at seven, but one enormous crying need which superseded all others—the need to be loved, to be responded to emotionally, to feel close to other human beings.

Did she get this? Let us look at those with whom she lived. First, her father, now forty-eight, not unkind but

unyielding and undemonstrative; who secluded himself in his study as in a hermit's hut; who prized the gentleman's rank, to which he had not been born but had attained, so much that it partially compensated for the loss of his Irish kin, his wife, and Thornton friends; who wrote with mind rather than heart inflated verse with which he was impressed; who because of an accommodating indigestion took lunch and dinner severely alone. Then Aunt Branwell, a forty-nine-year-old spinster who was bothered by noises, by cold draughts, by anything unpunctual or unexpected,<sup>1</sup> who kept much to her bedroom; who was too stiff in her joints for an impulsive caress, too decorous for a spontaneously affectionate word. Of the children, Charlotte was in some ways Emily's antithesis, a passionate little Philistine, a natural-born conventionalist and conformist, a lover of rules, a potential slave-driver, who, once she got her teeth in, never let go; at times a conscientious and systematic rebel but more often expert at obeying, who frowned on heresy or schism, and had a backbone propped upright in her flesh, as inflexible as a steel rod; who took her duties and obligations very seriously now that she was the eldest living child, with smashing power of will determined to acquit herself faithfully; who was a very remarkable child too, but who kept to the warm hearth when the wind was blowing; who craved love too, but in a different way than Emily, having a commensurable need. Then Branwell, a merry lad, but like most only sons inclined to lord it over his sisters and jeer at “girl stuff,” that is, expressions of tenderness; in his unique position, inordinately doted upon and truckled to; whom Emily envied, being like all emotionalists thirsty for approbation as well as love. And lastly, Anne, violet-eyed, pretty but peaked, who gave out little because she had little to give—partly from youngness (she was six) and partly by nature. These were Emily's dear ones from whom she craved love; these, all unconcernedly, refused love—or at least love of the quality and in the quantity which would have comforted so exorbitant a heart.

But Tabitha Aykroyd—the gnarled townswoman who had come to the Parsonage as servant in the summer of 1825? For all her rude Yorkshire ways—tongue as rough as a nutmeg-grater scraping a dialect with vowels so broad a stranger from another shire could not understand her—Tabby had a crusty kindness and bleak honest love. The

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 201, Note.

"bairns" soon got on the inside of her heart, and thereafter she defended them like a ratty old lioness her cubs. Being by habit very active (Yorkshire women of her class are born to back-breaking drudgery), as well as by nature shrewd and practical, she was soon grand vizier of the household, who spoke bluntly without convincing any one that she was as formidable as she made out. She cooked, washed dishes and clothes, took up ashes, carried out the slops, shovelled snow off the path, and—her virtue and significance in the children's eyes—told marvellously gruesome stories. Tabby had been born just ten years after Mr. Grimshaw's death, so was familiar with a sterner and more ancient way of life. Sitting in her armchair by the kitchen fire,<sup>1</sup> she told of the great tinkling of bells as packhorses stopped in Haworth once a week, decked out gaily in bright-coloured worsted adornments; and of citizenry rushing to load up their produce, to send it over the hills from Keighley to Colne and Burnley; and—more exciting—of folks who had seen "fairish" by the beck in the moonlit bottom. "It wur the factories as has drove 'em away," she said; and wistfully recalled the days of the wool-spinners, when weft was dried in baskets swung round by wuzzing sticks, and the slimy moss called laock gathered by stream-banks for bearings for shuttles and bobbin wheels. As she told of decayed gentry wiped out by some terrible doom she did not talk down; nor soften violent superstitions nor retrench, from a sense of propriety. Tabby was not squeamish. When the children were naughty she "let them have it."<sup>2</sup>

Every day except Sunday was in outward semblance like every other. The family rose at six or seven; which was sybarite, for Yorkshire farmers rose at four or five. Miss Branwell breakfasted in her room, but the children with their father in his study, on good hot oatmeal gruel. Then lessons were heard by Aunt and Papa in their respective domains, Aunt stressing female accomplishments, while Papa took full charge of his son and heir. At two o'clock Tabby served dinner to her solitary master; and to the rest of the family in the living-room, where Aunt, or, in Aunt's absence, Charlotte, presided solemnly over an earthenware soup turcen decorated with pale blue views of a manor house in front of which men were fishing,<sup>3</sup> and an old earthenware dish with castles painted on a brown willow-

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, IV, 92.

<sup>2</sup> Gaskell, 80, 81.

<sup>3</sup> Museum.

pattern.<sup>1</sup> Charlotte at this time, and perhaps the other children, ate no meat. Their diet laid an Irish stress on potatoes; which recalled, by thankfulness for plenty, the year of the terrible Irish potato blight—and the story of how Uncle Hugh, throwing baskets of rotten potatoes down a cliff, had laughed and shouted, “There’s a mouthful for the devil!”<sup>2</sup> In the afternoon the children were free to amuse themselves; and tea was festive, for Papa joined the circle, put both sugar and salt in his tea,<sup>3</sup> and fell to discussing the Tory *Leeds Intelligencer* and the Whig *Leeds Mercury*, which they subscribed to, and *John Bull*, high raging Tory, which Dr. Driver loaned them once a week; and the tea in the old brown teapot of gilt and lustre-ware<sup>4</sup> had to be replenished before the tea-cosy was popped down on it, like a huge extinguisher on a flame. Supper was a repetition of dinner, but lighter. After supper, prayers and Bible-reading; and at seven the children were packed off to bed. At nine Mr. Brontë ascended the stone steps to his room, having paused on the landing to wind the clock.

Sundays were special but not particularly joyous. If only as an example to the parish, the Parson’s family had to be well-scrubbed on the neck and behind the ears, perhaps from the washbowl on the washstand<sup>4</sup> in Aunt’s room, but more probably at Tabby’s unceremonial hands in a tin tub set by the fire in the kitchen; diked out in their best; and lined up on the Brontë pew-bench in front of the pulpit, having entered the black oak pew by its black oak door. Anne was meek; and Charlotte distinctly religious; but Branwell and Emily wiggled, and had to be transfixed by shafts from their father’s eye. But they gave rapt attention when the Rev. Brontë’s sermons ran to blood and thunder.

When their eyes roved there was nothing much to see. The interior of Haworth Church, like the exterior, was not beautiful. Mr. Grimshaw during his incumbency had hitched a long room on to an ancient tower, like a supine body attached to a hoary head. Six arched lead-paned windows were ranged the length of the nave, one over the door, and an extra tiny one to the left thrown in for luck. At the end, facing the Black Bull Inn as if to spy on it, was a larger, more elaborate window comprising fifteen panes. The children counted the squares furtively—three hundred

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 90, 94.

<sup>3</sup> *The Cornhill*, July, 1910.

<sup>2</sup> Mackay, 144–146.

<sup>4</sup> Museum.

and fourteen. The bare ceiling was upheld by stone pillars. The lectern had fringe around it. Occasionally a Baptism broke the monotony, or Communion, with the mystery of the pyx which contained the host. But the real, inexhaustible treat was a sprinkling of cherry-red glass over the choir—such a magical clear colour. The young eyes pastured there and were satisfied.<sup>1</sup>

With simple things they amused themselves in Church, at home, in the village, and on the moors. Tabby was making spicecakes over the peat coals in the kitchen fire-place and lustily singing an old ballad—dear knew where she had picked it up. . . . The mason was chipping a tombstone with a chisel and mallet in the yard across the lane, and a cloud of white stone-dust settled slowly. . . . A wild hare was playing in an old quarry pit, gaily flinging up bowed legs behind an absurd tail. . . . Grouse were crying on the moor, as if only they had a right there, and all the rest were interlopers.

As the autumn of 1825 wore on the cold northern sun sank below the hill-range at four in the afternoon. It was night: gloom had closed in like a door shutting; the Parsonage was an outpost on the edge of a strange, glorious, fearful, unchartable world. The wind sounded as if floodgates had broken and let loose rushing waters. The children were not allowed to continue their play among the blackened thorns, the now leafless currant bushes and gaunt ghosts of lilacs. The Duke of Wellington and his companions-in-arms were summoned imperiously from the front door by Tabby.

Indoors what could they do to while the hours away? Huddled in the nine-by-six children's-study they played games; talked about the queer and absolutely awful; and read whatever they could get their hands on. Believing that her ten years made her at last old enough, Mr. Brontë gave Charlotte her mother's copy of Thomas à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ*; <sup>2</sup> which, passing through Maria's hands, had helped to mould that spiritual nature. *Modern Domestic Medicine* by T. J. Graham<sup>2</sup> was a new book bound in green calf, just printed and just acquired, which had 561 pages full of amazing information about the organs inside the body and their ailments. In Papa's study, on the swinging shelves between the two windows,<sup>3</sup> were a Latin Homer and a Horace which Papa had won for keeping in the first class

<sup>1</sup> Old photographs.

<sup>2</sup> Museum.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, IV, 91.

at Cambridge, on the covers of which were the college arms, and in each of which Papa had written a behest to himself: “To be retained *semper*.” Only Branwell could make anything of the Latin—Papa was proud of his progress in that patrician tongue. But they could all pore over and understand *Historical and Miscellaneous Questions for the Use of Young People, with a Selection of British and General Geography* by Miss Richmal Mangnall,<sup>1</sup> printed in London in 1813 in an old calf binding; and *A Grammar of General Geography for the Use of Schools and Young Persons* by the Rev. J. Goldsmith,<sup>1</sup> printed in London in 1823; Lindley Murray’s sheepskin *English Grammar*<sup>1</sup> printed in 1818 in York, which the girls had brought home from Cowan Bridge; and Mr. Morgan’s *Sermons and Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth of Famous Memory*;<sup>1</sup> and Scott’s *Tales of a Grandfather*;<sup>1 2</sup> and *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*<sup>1</sup>—best of all.

On May 9, 1826, when the cherry-tree was in bloom, they decided to act Prince Charlie’s famous escape into the oak tree, but Emily, dressed as the prince and climbing through the back-bedroom window, broke a branch, and the conspirators in a panic had to blacken the break with soot to keep Papa from noticing.<sup>3</sup>

Charlotte was growing very close to Branwell, because they were more of an age and both rather aggressive and voluble; Emily close to Anne, because in silences they were similar, Anne from shyness, Emily by blind policy.

One day in June 1826 Mr. Brontë, in the rôle of loving father, brought Branwell, who shared his bedroom, a box of wooden soldiers from Leeds, but arrived home too late at night to show the girls. The next morning when Charlotte and Emily woke in the box-room (Anne still shared Aunt’s bedroom) there stood Branwell at the door, proudly exhibiting the wooden soldiers. Leaping out of bed Charlotte seized a little painted man. “This,” she cried, “is the Duke of Wellington! This shall be the Duke!”—for wasn’t he the prettiest, the tallest, the most perfect in every part? Anne chose a queer figure they called “Waiting-boy.”

<sup>1</sup> Museum.

<sup>2</sup> Three volumes, inscribed in Miss Branwell’s hand: “The volumes were written by Sir Walter Scott, and the Hugh Little John mentioned in them is Master Lockhart, grandson to Sir Walter. A New Year’s Gift by Miss E. B. to her dear little nephew and nieces Patrick, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë, 1828.”

<sup>3</sup> Chadwick, 87.



Branwell's was christened "Buonaparte"; Emily's grave fellow "Gravey." Thus the inception of the game "Young Men,"<sup>1</sup> who had four genii, Chief Genius Talli, Chief Genius Branni, Chief Genius Emmi, and Chief Genius Anni.

"Our Fellows," which took its rise from *Æsop's Fables*, was "established" in June 1827.<sup>2</sup>

Then one December night in 1827, while a snowstorm blew, they were all sitting around a warm blazing kitchen fire which cast a glow—but not enough, they said, they wanted a candle. The frugal Tabby would not sacrifice one—what sheer awful waste! There was a long silence—till Branwell said in a lazy voice:

"I don't know what to do."

This sentiment was echoed by Emily and Anne.

"Wha, ya may go t' bed," said Tabby.

"I'd rather do anything than that," Branwell maintained stoutly.

Charlotte spoke up:

"Why are you so glum to-night, Tabby? Oh! suppose we had each an island of our own."

Branwell was quick to seize on this guarantee against boredom.

"If we had," he said, "I would choose the Island of Man."

"I would choose the Isle of Wight," said Charlotte.

Nine-and-a-half-year-old Emily travelled from England back to the land of her paternal forebears.

"The Isle of Arran," she declared, "for me."

But Anne was British.

"Mine shall be Guernsey," she said.

All children love choosing: *Which would you rather have, a gold palace or a silver palace? Where would you rather be, on the moon or on a star?* . . .

So that wild snowy night while the wind whistled they peopled their islands. Branwell, proud to exhibit both patriotism and literary taste, chose John Bull (how witty they must have considered this), Astley Cooper and Leigh Hunt; Charlotte her perennial Duke of Wellington, and his two "sons," Christopher North and Co., and Mr. Abernethy; Anne, who had imbibed Papa's Tory politics, Michael Sadler, Lord Bentinck and Sir Henry Halford; and Emily, evidently touched by the great bankrupt's heroic struggle

<sup>1</sup> *History of the Year 1829*, by Charlotte Brontë.

<sup>2</sup> Gaskell, 87.

to pay his creditors to the last penny, Sir Walter Scott, with Mr. Lockhart and Johnny. All things considered, Emily's inhabitants would probably have been the most genial and entertaining.

Just then the clock struck seven, and the romanticists were hustled off to bed.<sup>1</sup>

But the next day they were back at their game; indeed, from then on they played islands assiduously. The two modern geographies (also an old geography of 1709, on the fly-leaf of which Maria had written, “Papa lent me this book”<sup>1</sup>) were fingered over hundreds of times; the blue patches of seas scoured for the little black dots which were islands. In June 1828 they erected a school for 1000 children on a fictitious island fifty miles in circumference.<sup>2</sup> (It is a safe assumption that two of the architects saw to it that the school in no way resembled Cowan Bridge.) At last these extraordinary children had a subject on which they could expend their imaginations without exhausting it. Exhaust their imaginations they could not.

The very month that “Islanders” got going Charlotte and Emily each invented a secret game. “Emily's and my best plays,” Charlotte wrote, “were established December 1, 1827; the others March 1828. Best plays mean secret plays; they are very nice ones. All our plays are very strange ones. Their nature I need not write on paper, for I think I shall always remember them.” These secret games were the Angrian and Gondal myths which later grew to epic proportions. They were similar to “Islanders,” yet not “Islanders.” As creators and instigators Charlotte took Branwell into her secret; and Emily, Anne. Henceforth a line was drawn. It was two pairs against the world, and silently, inevitably, with mounting but never explicit rivalry, against each other.<sup>3</sup>

At first the dichotomy was ignored. So much energy overflowed, it ran in all directions. Papa was an author—why not they? The world was full of a variety of things—how exciting! There was music, there was painting, there was poetry!—tremendous discoveries. The roof of the Parsonage was in danger of flying off, from sheer under-pressure. On May 17, 1828, Branwell seized a pencil and laboured over a

<sup>1</sup> *Tale of the Islanders*, by Charlotte Brontë, June 31, 1829.

<sup>2</sup> *History of the Year 1829*, by Charlotte Brontë.

<sup>3</sup> Several of Charlotte's early poems are signed U.T., meaning Us Two.

sketch of a round-tower and distant castle, with magnanimity inscribing it "For Anne Brontë, P. B. B."

That set them off. Everyone was shown the sketch, everyone marvelled. Behind their eyes flashed the startled thought: He's going to be a great artist! For it really did resemble a tower and a castle.

Whereupon many medieval structures were reared by Charlotte, Emily and Anne. Charlotte did a ruined tower with a wide Norman gateway, signing it "C. B., September the 2, for Anne, a copy,"<sup>1</sup> and two days later a thatched cottage, also for Anne.<sup>1</sup> Unassertive Anne, aged nine, had turned art collector. Did she pay the readiest compliments?

This was a fair beginning, but it was deadness and staleness compared to the frantic and brilliant activity of 1829. Aunt thought the children very good, whispering in the box-room. Or were they up to mischief? In February Branwell sketched another ruined tower for Anne. What romantic book were they copying illustrations out of? In April Anne produced a bird and toad. On May 22 both Charlotte and Emily were shading with a pencil, rubbing out, squinting. Charlotte's picture was of three girls, one holding a child, one offering a nosegay from an original position on the ground, one, not very ladylike, climbing a tree; which accomplishment she labelled. "Fancy Piece by Ch<sup>e</sup>. Br<sup>e</sup>."<sup>1</sup> Emily's, which she dated and signed, was a ring ouzel or blackbird<sup>1</sup>—copied from Bewick's excellent two-volumed *History of British Birds*, 1832, illustrated by exquisite bird-vignettes done with delicate hairlike lines. Her technique is superior to that of her sisters and brother, the observation more exact and the execution at once firmer and freer. It is as if she loved the ring ouzel.

Were her stories at this time equally superior? Though they are dust, one suspects on the strength of her later achievement that they were. What one of the four children did, they all did. Charlotte's voluminous output during the year 1829 may therefore be taken as an index to Emily's.

In March Charlotte, with her sense of orderliness, undertook to write, before it was ten weeks gone, *A History of the Year 1829*, which opens with a delightfully intimate domestic scene. "While I write this I am in the kitchen of the Parsonage, Haworth; Tabby, the servant, is washing up the breakfast things, and Anne, my younger sister (Maria was my eldest) is kneeling on a chair, looking at some cakes

<sup>1</sup> Museum.

which Tabby had been baking for us. Emily is in the parlour, brushing the carpet. Papa and Branwell are gone to Keighley. Aunt is upstairs in her room, and I am sitting by the table writing this in the kitchen. Keighley is a small town four miles from here. Papa and Branwell are gone for the newspaper, the *Leeds Intelligencer*, a most excellent Tory newspaper, edited by Mr. Wood, and the proprietor Mr. Henneman. . . . We see the *John Bull*; it is a high Tory, very violent. Dr. Driver lends us it, as likewise *Blackwood's Magazine*, the most able periodical there is. The editor is Mr. Christopher North, an old man seventy-four years of age; the first of April is his birthday; his company are Timothy Tickler, Morgan O'Doherty, Macra-bin Mordecai, Mullion, Warrall and James Hogg, a man of most extraordinary genius, . . . Scottish shepherd." Already the Brontës were seeking out "genius," feeling excited by, and at the same time at home in, such company.<sup>1</sup>

A month later Charlotte wrote *The Twelve Adventurers* and *Adventures in Ireland*, two romantic tales in a volume printed by hand in characters so tiny they require a magnifying glass. About a hundred of these booklets, stitched and covered with brown sugar-paper, exist. The minute printing is evidence of shortage of pocket-money, and a desire to make their efforts look as professional as possible. In a six-penny notebook such as laundresses use (most of their books were one or two-penny) Mr. Brontë inserted a warning: "All that is written in this book must be in good, plain and legible hand." In June Charlotte was finishing up the first of four brown-covered volumes of *Tales of the Islanders*: "One evening the Duke of Wellington was writing in his room in Downing Street. He was reposing at his ease in a simple easy-chair, smoking a homely tobacco-pipe, for he disdained all the modern frippery of cigars. . . ." This game was a thousand times more splendid than tag, or run-sheep-run or button-button. The following July Charlotte wrote *Leisure Hours, a Tale and Two Fragments*, as gravely as a seasoned author. Then she was a subscriber writing a letter to a newspaper: "Sir," she wrote, "It is well known that the Genii have declared that unless they perform certain arduous duties every year, of a mysterious nature, all the worlds in the firmament will be burnt up, and gathered together in one mighty globe, which will roll in solitary grandeur through the vast wilderness of space,

<sup>1</sup> Charlotte was soon, in self-election, to sign herself "The Genius C. B."

inhabited only by the four high princes of the Genii, till time shall be succeeded by eternity; and the impudence of this is only to be paralleled by another of their assertions, namely, that by their magic might they can reduce the world to a desert, the purest waters to streams of livid poison"—and more, in extravagant peroration. In August this girl of thirteen wrote *The Search after Happiness, a Tale*; also began to "edit" *The Young Men's Magazine*, a monthly—which so fascinated her in November and December she doubled the numbers. Among the Contents were "The Spirit of Cawdor" (which suggests that the children were reading *Macbeth*), "Interior of a Pothouse" (a poem), "The Glass Town" (they loved the idea of transparency), "Song of the Ancient Britons" (which shows a healthy pride in their forebears), "Scene in My Tun" (a large brewer's cask), "An American Tale" (pioneer America, in which Andrew Jackson had but recently been inaugurated, suited their romantic fancies), "Lines Written on Seeing the Garden of a Genius," and "The Swiss Artist." In December she completed the second volume of the *Tale of the Islanders*: "The School Rebellion," "The Strange Incident in the Duke of Wellington's Life"; "Tales to His Sons"; and the Marquis of Douro's and Lord Charles Wellesley's "Tale to His Little King and Queen." But the tired author did not rest till replenished, like a fallow field. No, that same December she completed (modestly) *A Book of Rhymes*; which contained "The Beauty of Nature," "Meditations while Journeying in a Canadian Forest," "Song of an Exile," and a nostalgic poem "On Seeing the Ruins of the Tower of Babel."

Were ever subjects of such diversity tackled all in a breath? Fine imaginations, before disciplined by the exigencies of composition and the disappointments of life, run mad, like unbroken colts turned out of barns. Charlotte was thirteen, Branwell twelve, Emily eleven and Anne ten, but the little room above the passage seethed with their endeavours—like a hive when bees are concocting honey.

Charlotte's style (and by that token Emily's, since in these early years neither's was greatly differentiated) was remarkably clean and forthright in descriptions of actual events. A good example is an apologetic introduction to the second volume of the *Tale of the Islanders*: a vividly graphic account of the family passion for politics:

"Parliament was opened, and the great Catholic question was brought forward, and the Duke's measures were disclosed,

and all was slander, violence, party spirit, and confusion. Oh, those six months, from the time of the King's Speech to the end! Nobody could write, think or speak on any subject but the Catholic question, and the Duke of Wellington, and Mr. Peel. I remember the day when the Intelligence Extraordinary came with Mr. Peel's speech in it, containing the terms on which the Catholics were to be let in! With what eagerness Papa tore off the cover, and how we all gathered round him, and with what breathless anxiety we listened, as one by one they were disclosed, and explained, and argued upon so ably, and so well! and then when it was all out, how Aunt said that she thought it was excellent, and that the Catholics could do no harm with such good security! I remember also the doubts as to whether it would pass the House of Lords, and the prophecies that it would not; and when the paper came which was to decide the question, the anxiety was almost dreadful with which we listened to the whole affair: the opening of the doors; the hush; the royal dukes in their robes, and the great Duke in green sash and waistcoat; the rising of all the peeresses when he rose; the reading of his speech—Papa saying that his words were like precious gold; and lastly, the majority of one to four (*sic*) in favour of the Bill.”

The Brontës, for all the poverty of their social life, were singularly blessed in rich early literary influences. Their father wrote prose and verse of marvellous mediocrity, but his everyday speech, uncoerced by the falsely inflated literary practice of the day, was Celtic in its vigour, forthrightness and waywardly concrete imagination. “The Duke's words are like precious gold.” And no matter how restive they felt during family prayers and compulsory Sunday sermons, the young Brontës had the inestimable advantage of hearing over and over, till it was dissolved in their blood and converted into their very substance, noble Biblical prose. In Shakespeare they tasted strong meat, and had an appetite for more. Mr. Brontë never tempered the wind for his lambs; their soft curling wool might have been flayed off their backs, for all of him—but they were hardy, they developed. The knottiest political problems were discussed in their presence—indeed *with* them, as if they were Mr. Brontë's peers, as they were. Branwell might have had this undilute education in many an early-Victorian home; but for girls it was rare. Charlotte and Emily, profiting by unrestricted, gave no especial thanks; they took freedom for granted, like native air, and so did not inhale it into

their lungs shallowly, with suspicion, but unconsciously, in easy draughts, and were the more deeply impregnated. If, in spare moments, they picked up *Sermons and Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of Queen Elizabeth*, the prose had a dignity and beauty familiar to their ears and their spirit. When, on the other hand, Tabby discoursed in her uncouth but splendidly pungent style, she sounded not different from the Elizabethans, only rougher and less regenerate—the pith and marrow were the same. All that was high-flavoured these children passionately loved. What had they to do with pap?

The autumn of 1828, in the midst of innumerable imaginative events there transpired an event of great human importance. Aunt Branwell bundled up the four children and set out in Haworth's one gig to visit her Uncle Fennell twelve miles away at Crosstone, near Todmorden. As they jogged over rut-filled roads it seemed a bold adventure. Mamma had been visiting Great-uncle John Fennell when she met and married Papa—how strange the thought! At that time he had been Governor of Woodhouse Grove Wesleyan Academy; but now, by honourable conversion, was a curate in the Church of England. His wife, blood-aunt to Mamma, had died the previous May, and the widower appreciated the distraction of youthful voices. It was September, by rights a pleasant month, but the weather was perverse. Charlotte the eldest, charged to inform her father of their imminent return to the fold, wrote from the Parsonage House, Crosstone, September 23, 1828:

“My dear Papa,—At Aunt's request I write these lines to inform you that ‘if all be well’ we shall be at home on Friday by dinnertime, when we hope to find you in good health. On account of the bad weather we have not been out much, but notwithstanding we have spent our time very pleasantly, between reading, working, and learning our lessons, which Uncle Fennell has been so kind to teach us every day. Branwell has taken two sketches from nature, and Emily, Anne, and myself have likewise each of us drawn a piece from some views of the lakes which Mr. Fennell brought with him from Westmoreland. The whole of these he intends keeping. Mr. Fennell is sorry he cannot accompany us to Haworth on Friday, for want of room, but hopes to have the pleasure of seeing you soon. All unite in sending their kind love with your affectionate daughter,

Charlotte Brontë.”

About this time Charlotte (no doubt in collusion with her sisters and brother) drew up a list of painters whose works she wanted to see: Guido Reni, Julio Romano, Titian, Raphael, Michael Angelo, Corregio, Annibal Caracci, Leonardo da Vinci, Fra Bartolomeo, Carlo Cignani, Vanduyke, Rubens, Bartolomeo Ramerghi—some of which names might puzzle a cultivated person of to-day. Yet the children seized joyfully upon the bad engravings in “Friendship’s Offering for 1829.” They were ubiquitous in loving the high pure empyrean of art—and the denser substratum below.

When 1830 came in all frosty and the moor-snow was too deep to be waded, happiness reigned in the box-room. They had got a box of water-colour ! Much more exciting than a drawing-pencil ! To take a perfectly white sheet, and then dip a brush in water so that it emerged dark and sleek and glistening, and slither it over bright pigment, making a streak, a shape—oh, it was wonderful ! They copied many flowers—a wild rose, a moss rose, primroses ; and in March a mountain sparrow. Black-and-white wash-drawings married the pencil to the brush.

But they did not desert the vast field of fiction and poetry ; valiant obscure authors. Lacking Emily’s manuscript we can but examine Charlotte’s for 1830, which they necessarily resembled. In January she wrote a poem “Upon the Occasion of the Dinner Given to the Literati of Glass-town ; which was attended by all the great men of the present time : Soldier, Sailor, Poet and Painter, Architect, Politician, Novelist and Romancer.” In a short story she described Lord Charles Wellesley, the Great Duke’s younger son, whose home was Africa : “He was reclining under the shadow of an immense chestnut-tree, playing upon a small Spanish guitar, and with a nightingale perched upon his shoulder. A beautiful grey monkey, a small silky spaniel, and a young kitten bounded and danced before him in the brilliant light of the uprisen moon.” In February she wrote *The Adventures of Edward de Crack* ; in May completed the third volume of the *Tale of the Islanders*, and *The Adventures of Ernest Alembert*, and *Miscellaneous Poems* ; in June *An Interesting Incident in the Lives of Some of the Most Eminent Persons of the Age* ; in July *Poetaster*, a drama in two volumes, and the fourth volume of *Islanders* which contained “The Three Old Washerwomen of Strath-fieldsaye” reminiscent of the three witches in *Macbeth*. How did that pocket-like study hold the children’s com-



positions, let alone the children? Charlotte wrote a boastful *Catalog of My Books up to August 8, 1830*, "making in the whole twenty-two volumes." Then the victor rested on her shield; but roused to write a poem. "The Viol't" has the distinction of coining an expressive word, "sugh," meaning the sound of turgid water, and of mentioning Homer, Sophocles, Euripides, Æschylus, Tasso, and Virgil!

Then they reopened the paint-box. In December Branwell copied from Martin no one less than Queen Esther; Charlotte, less exotically, chose "Bessy Bell and Mary Gray." Then in November Charlotte produced some metrical "Reflections on the Fate of Neglected Genius." She and Branwell were playing at Angria, a country in East Africa; Emily and Anne at Gondaland, an island in the North Pacific.

What did Emily write? What paint? What, with her outward gaiety and inward sorrow, think that autumn of her thirteenth year? She had reached puberty, with new thoughts and new emotions. She deceived everyone in the house as to the nature of her true life by the simple expedient of keeping her mouth closed.

The possibility of again sending the girls off to school now agitated quiet waters. They had outstripped the simple intelligence of Aunt Branwell. Papa felt capable of educating Branwell<sup>1</sup>—the boy was translating Horace—but hesitated, with uncharacteristic humility, before the female mystery. Charlotte's eyes (sorel-brown and rather close together above a large nose and odd mouth) shone with a light that lusted after knowledge. It was clear to her that to get on in the world one must have the weapon of learning, as a person walking among weeds requires a stout stick to slash with. Emily showed no such enterprise. She would rather stay home, she said shortly. Oh, but this would be quite different from Cowan Bridge, they argued; Miss Wooler's at Roe Head near Kirkstall, between Leeds and Huddersfield, was more like a home than school; there were only ten boarders, and Miss Margaret Wooler was an estimable and charming woman. She would rather stay home, Emily repeated. So it was decided that Charlotte, as advance guard, should go forth and spy out the land.<sup>2</sup>

All of her clothes were made at home: a turmoil of snip-

<sup>1</sup> Branwell's attendance at the poorly-organized boys' grammar school in the direction of Oxenhope had been brief.

<sup>2</sup> Gaskell, 94.

ping, basting, button-sewing, taping, gathering, tucking, washing and ironing! In early nineteenth-century England, middle-class underwear was muslin and voluminous; night-gowns put a halter close around the neck; and dresses triumphed by sheer yardage. Many of Charlotte's and Emily's and Anne's, at this juncture, appear to have been of morbid-green stuff, with white collars big enough to sail a ship;<sup>1</sup> a style strongly influenced by Aunt Branwell whose notions of *chic* had not altered since her storied and lamented youth in Penzance.

But an old lady of eighty-seven who lived in Haworth the first half of her life has improved the picture: “Oh, dear, when I think about them I can see them as plain to my mind's eye as if they were here. They wore light-coloured dresses all print, and they were all dressed alike until they gate into young women . . . nice print; plain with long sleeves and high neck and tippets down to the waist. The tippets were narrow to their dresses and they'd light-coloured hats on. They looked grand.”<sup>2</sup>

As Emily helped sew her sister's apparel her thoughts wandered far. Young ladies of that period sat perfectly erect in their chairs—but the mind, unsheathing itself, is devious, sinuous, subtle. The wintry rains rained down, slanting dark and monotonous. The long flat tombstones that paved the churchyard dripped wet. Emily was glad Mamma and Maria and Elizabeth were indoors, out of the damp. . . . She would like to get another book from the Mechanics' Institute in Keighley. It was a long walk down the steep hill, past the woollen factories, but pleasant. . . . She was twelve. Next summer she would be thirteen. Juliet had married at thirteen. . . . What would happen to her in the grey future? What of personal importance could happen to anyone here on the edge of palcolithic moors? But there were forces in the world—she felt them working, without ever being able to confront them and call them by name. Sometimes a chill unconnected with weather floated down her backbone—like the sensation which attacked her on Sundays when she sat in the family pew dutifully listening to Papa's periods, and her eyes, one moment unaware and the next moment fascinated, read the Biblical exhortation on the mural tablet by the Communion table, after the date of her mother's decease: “Be ye also ready: for in such an

<sup>1</sup> Painting by Branwell.

<sup>2</sup> *The Cornhill*, July, 1910.

hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh.”<sup>1</sup> In such an hour as ye think not. . . .

Strange, that incident in the kitchen last June—she remembered the day exactly.

Papa had been sick in bed with inflammation of the lungs,<sup>2</sup> and it was nine-thirty in the morning, and suddenly (she had not been present but had heard the story over and over) there had come a knock at the kitchen door. Tabby had risen and opened it, and there stood an old man the likes of whom she had never seen before, asking :

“Does the Parson live here?”

“Yes.”

“I wish to see him.”

“He is poorly in bed,” said Tabby.

“I have a message for him,” said the old man.

“Who from?”

“From the Lord.”

“Who?”

“The Lord. He desires me to say that the Bridegroom is coming, and that we must prepare to meet Him; that the cords are about to be loosed, and the golden bowl broken; the pitcher broken at the fountain.”

Then the old man had abruptly departed.<sup>3</sup>

Was he a foot-loose religious fanatic? From where? His words seemed to Emily mournful and beautiful.

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 86.

<sup>3</sup> Gaskell, 92.

## VIII

### BOOKLESS KNOWLEDGE

ON the cold morning of January 19, 1831, Charlotte set out for Roe Head.<sup>1</sup> Emily helped her pack and pile her luggage into the hired covered cart, and kissed her with the others, and waved. For Charlotte she felt great fondness, but not as passionate a fondness as she was capable of. That night she and Anne, freed from Aunt's espionage, had the box-room to themselves and could romance endlessly, if they whispered and were careful without danger of alien ears stealing their secrets. Papa and Aunt went to sleep early, and Branwell in the room behind Papa's was comparatively remote. In the silent house the clock on the stairs ticked loudly. It struck the hour, resolute, mysterious. After Anne was asleep Emily lay awake, her eyes wide open on the dark. She loved this privilege of solitary fancy. Wild and splendid images floated through her mind, like driftwood on the bosom of waters. Anne was gentle and negative; she added little to the richness of dreams; but was not an obstacle; retarded nothing. Yes, it was sad that Charlotte had gone away and was homesick, and the family group altered. But how uncontroversial and relaxed the house was!

In the morning when they sprang out of bed the uncarpeted floor was ice-cold under their feet. The box-room was scarcely big enough to hold a bed, a chair and a chest of drawers—there was no fireplace and no stove. Perhaps they dashed into Aunt's sanctuary and dressed by her grate; or used a brazier such as warmed people in the Middle Ages (brass bed-warmers with long handles and perforated lids, filled with red-hot coals, were still a regular Yorkshire institution); but more likely both girls were inured to the plunge from warm bed into frosty air and expert in the art of dressing swiftly, even when the fingers that forced buttons through button-holes were stiff.

The woodwork had been decorated, child-fashion, with initials, scribbles and drawings;<sup>2</sup> which made the room more theirs. The deep-silled uncurtained window looked past the church and a few houses in the bottom to the brown, undulating hills.

<sup>1</sup> Charlotte's godmother, the wife of the Rev. Thomas Atkinson of Hartshead, paid her Roe Head fees. (Chadwick, 91.)

<sup>2</sup> Found recently, when subsequent layers of white-wash had been scraped off.

Charlotte wrote that, in spite of her ignorance of grammar and her unsystematic knowledge of geography, kind Miss Wooler had switched her from second class to first. The seven or eight pupils were genteel. One girl a year younger than herself—Ellen Nussey—was already her particular friend; and a highly intelligent girl—Mary Taylor—she admired. All except herself played games with a ball; she sat still and read, or went and stood under a tree “where it was pleasanter.” Whenever she got an opportunity, she examined engravings minutely. The girls argued a great deal about politics, and of course she joined in furiously. They were mostly Whigs in politics, as Dissenters in religion, while she was hot Tory and immovable Church of England.

She dreamed one night that she was wanted in the drawing-room, and it was Maria and Elizabeth, upon whom, like Emily, she still expended such intense love; but they had forgot what they used to care for, and were changed and fashionably dressed, and began criticizing the room. There is something terrible about this dream that was a projection of her homesickness, a way of saying all was unfamiliar and malignly metamorphosed.

Then a pupil said she was always talking about clever people, Johnson, Sheridan, and so forth, and she retorted: “Now you don’t know the meaning of *clever*; Sheridan might be clever, yes, Sheridan was clever—scamps often are—but Johnson hadn’t a spark of cleverality in him”—which set her unliterary school fellows joking about “cleverality,” and she relapsed into silence.<sup>1</sup>

It is not likely Charlotte wrote the latter incident home, unless to observe that the girls at Roe Head knew so much about some things and so little about others. But whatever she wrote, the inmates of the Parsonage pounced with satisfaction upon the letters. In an isolated country district a letter is the day’s boon. New things were happening to Charlotte; nothing new was happening at home. In the concrete and vigorous details of her letters the home-bound lived a vicarious life. Mrs. Franks of Huddersfield, who had been Miss Elizabeth Firth of Kipping House, was, in consequence of a letter from Mr. Brontë,<sup>2</sup> being very nice; Charlotte wrote to acknowledge a frock and muslin from Mrs. Franks and a shawl from Miss Outhwaite.<sup>3</sup> Oh, that was

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 89–92.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 85, 86.

<sup>3</sup> An old Thornton friend of the Brontës and Firths, and Anne’s god-mother.

news! There was speculation around the Parsonage dinner-table. What kind of a frock? What kind of a shawl? Emily had never been greatly interested in clothes, but still . . .

In May fourteen-year-old Branwell hiked all the way to Roe Head, twenty miles. Sprinting on the moors had been a good apprenticeship for this bold and arduous adventure: a touching expression of his affection for Charlotte. As they sat in the Roe Head drawing-room did they add a few flourishes to their Angria, crained by the Calabar River, east of the Niger delta? The story had grown to huge proportions. They skipped nimbly among seven provinces: Zamorna, Edwardston, Syderham, Northangerland, Howard, Warner and Arundel. Meanwhile Branwell's eyes bulged at such fine parlour-furnishings, for he had been nowhere and seen nothing; his eyes looked as if they could be knocked off with a stick.

When he got home and recounted his adventures to an attentive audience, his face glowed. Aren't you nearly dead, Branwell? No, he was all right. Excitement bore a man up.

Emily might have essayed the same journey on foot, for she was a seasoned walker, strong and unafraid; but the mere suggestion would have been unladylike. At such times her mind, boy-like in forthrightness, knew the heavy joy of silent revolt; and her jealousy of Branwell as a privileged male, which had smouldered so obscurely that the smoke was hardly visible to herself, broke into a small and disappearing but recognizable flame.

Charlotte wrote on May 17:

"Dear Branwell,—As usual I address my weekly letter to you, because to you I find the most to say. I feel exceedingly anxious to know how and in what state you arrived at home after your long and (I should think) very fatiguing journey. I could perceive when you arrived at Roe Head that you were very much tired, though you refused to acknowledge it. After you were gone, many questions and subjects of conversation recurred to me which I had intended to mention to you, but quite forgot them in the agitation which I felt at the totally unexpected pleasure of seeing you. . . . I hope with you that the present delightful weather will contribute to the perfect restoration of our dear Papa's health, and that it may give Aunt pleasant reminiscences of the salubrious climate of her native place. With love to all, Believe me, dear Branwell, to remain your affectionate sister,

Charlotte."

The present delightful weather. . . . Spring when it finally breaks at Haworth is always delightful, not only as contrast to pitiless winter but as a thing in itself, an absolute, a blowing of soft vapours, a springing of hair-grass and bent-grass, a hastening of invisible sap.

On pretty days Emily and Anne sat on stools under the garden-thorns and scribbled on knee-desks;<sup>1</sup> or perched on the natural stone-seat near the falls.<sup>2</sup>

Emily was out in the sun and rain, occasionally with Anne, more often alone. She was tall for her thirteen years. Her hair was still darker than in childhood, and in certain lights, and always in anger, her grey eyes were wine-dark too. She avoided the village as much as possible, going out the back door, or out the front door and around the house by a narrow walk; then cut through pastures where sheep grazed, through iron stiles, along a rough wagon-road, into pathless furze. Then at last she was where she longed to be. Exultation welled like a physical ache within her breast; her head went up, fronting the blast, her nostrils tense, as if carved from marble. A lapwing wheeled above, and a pair of finches fluttered up, and a moorcock was startled from a bunch of golden bent, and grouse screamed. But she did not abdicate to the birds. These moors were her very own. She soaked herself in ancient silence.

Many a time she came in with her pale sallowish cheeks whipped bright pink, so that those who saw her every day and took her rather fine features for granted, stared; many a time crept in with wet feet, and slipped off her shoes and stretched her stockinged toes toward the fire, while Tabby scolded.

Walking on the moors, drinking in the large air compensated for so much. She could not have told why she was possessed by a frenzy of love for a waste of ground and sky. She felt kin to that landscape. She did not set up nor foster the relation: but recognized it, and responded. She could do the dulllest household chore—sweep the parlour carpet, turn Branwell's frayed cuffs, iron, spread up beds, kneed dough—if afterwards she could escape to the hills. She could endure Papa's sternness, Aunt's garrulousness, Tabby's blustering, Branwell's brotherly heckling. Anne knew this about her. Since they had established the Gondalians on their far Pacific islands, Anne knew a great deal about Emily. But not all. Anne would have been astounded at certain things.

<sup>1</sup> Robinson, 70.

<sup>2</sup> Private research.

She would not have believed; would not have gotten to the place where it is necessary to begin believing; would not have understood. Emily had a logical and lucid mind, but she herself did not understand all of her emotions. She had clues to them merely. There is such a thing as being driven along by the wind.

At home she was to outward appearance not very different from other young girls of her time. It was just that she was more taciturn, abrupt and angular, and, in manners and predilections, less feminine. Captain Cory they had called her once,<sup>1</sup> perhaps in half-conscious echo of her McClory grandmother of County Down. There was little softness in her, and no yielding, and for that reason she often clashed with her father. She loved him, but at a young age saw through him. It was extremely disagreeable to Mr. Brontë to be unable to impress her with his absolute-monarch tactics, and but natural if he became more rigid in handling this one strange offspring; and if she, in reaction, grew secretly a little contemptuous though never quite insubordinate, that too was not unnatural.

She continued her literary and artistic efforts as Charlotte continued hers. Emily's have been destroyed. But henceforth it is useless to winnow Charlotte's on the chance of gleaning some idea of the nature of Emily's. The four children were no longer working as a unit, inspired by ideas held in common and exhaustively discussed. If Emily worked with anyone, now, it was with Anne—and Anne's compositions, like Emily's, have fallen prey to the struck and gluttonous match. But one thing is certain: her mind was absorbed by Gondalians, that unique race which she and Anne had formed, as freely as God out of the dust formed Adam and Eve, and deposited on a private archipelago in the Pacific; she was fighting their battles, planning their intrigues, suffering their losses and sorrows, rejoicing when they rejoiced. About this time Anne in an idle moment added a list of Gondalian places to the "Vocabulary of Proper Names" at the back of Goldsmith's *Grammar of General Geography*:

Alexandria, a kingdom in Gaaldine.

Almedore, a kingdom in Gaaldine.

Elseraden, a kingdom in Gaaldine.

Gaaldine, a large Island newly discovered in the South Pacific.

Gondal, a large Island in the North Pacific.

<sup>1</sup> The "publisher" of one of Charlotte's "books."



Regina, the capitol of Gondal.

Ula, a kingdom in Gaaldine, governed by 4 Sovereigns.

Zelona, a kingdom in Gaaldine.

Zedora, a large Province in Gaaldine, governed by a Viceroy.

Nothing is more conducive to writing good literature than reading good literature. It quickens and, by the principle of like attracting like, draws out the best. At thirteen Emily was losing childhood's fickleness of allegiance; and, as her character became more clear in outline, her taste became more and more stable and individual; she not only knew what books were admirable and what books were not, but why. Anne had a copy of *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1823,<sup>1</sup> which her godmother Miss Outhwaite had given her in February 1827; and this book Emily instinctively loved, less for its exalted faith than for the rightness and majesty of its language. On the Parsonage shelves were Southey's poetry, which interested her; and Wordsworth's poetry, which, with its rapt belief in the spirit of nature, again and again expressed those feelings which battered her own breast, as fundamental to her life as her heart's beat. Less worthy pieces of writing were stacked there also: "Some venerable Lady's Magazines, that had once performed a voyage with their owner"—poor Maria Branwell—"and undergone a storm, and whose pages were stained with salt water; some mad Methodist Magazines full of miracles and apparitions and preternatural warnings, ominous dreams, and frenzied fanaticisms; and the equally mad letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe from the Dead to the Living. . . ." <sup>2</sup> Emily read these from curiosity and for amusement, while perfectly sure of their inferiority.

About this time Mr. Driver dropped his subscription or fell out with the Brontës, for *Blackwood's* ceased to come to the Parsonage every week, and the children, considering it "the best magazine there is," were in despair. They hoped Aunt with her savings from £50 a year would subscribe. But *Blackwood's* was a little too rawly polemical for Aunt's taste. She compromised on *Frasier's*.<sup>3</sup>

As spring advanced Emily re-read the worn copy of James Thomson's *The Seasons*, subscribed in a meticulous hand: "Maria Branwell, 1804, Penzance."<sup>1</sup> Thomson's poetry is a swinging away from the neat classicism of Dryden and Pope. *The Seasons*, while not as pompous as Young's *Night*

<sup>1</sup> Museum.

<sup>2</sup> A list in *Shirley*, obviously describing a part of the Brontë library.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 88.

*Thoughts*, nor as gloomy as Blair's *The Grave*, has the faint nostalgia never wholly absent from beauty. In the sense of giving to nature the minute attention inseparable from love, Thomson's approach to the seasons is "romantic":

Come, gentle Spring! ethereal Mildness! come.

As the year richened into summer and Emily struck out across the moors, certain of Thomson's phrases backwashed from the sea of memory on to the shore of her conscious mind:

The meek-eyed morn : appears, mother of dews,  
and,

Yonder comes the powerful king of day  
Rejoicing in the east.

Presently when she looked across Keighley moors she saw "autumn nodding o'er the yellow plain"; and then one day, "See, Winter comes to rule the varied year . . . cruel as death and hungry as the grave." There is pleasure in sad things when they are justly and fitly expressed. There is bliss, pure though only momentary, for the fastidious when they light on fastidious words:

Shade, unperceived, so softening into shade.

Emily, though young, could appreciate such delicate accuracy. Before one does what is fine one loves what is fine: love is an absolute prerequisite. In Thomson's *The Seasons* in the Parsonage, Emily's instinctive love of fineness (such traits can be cultivated but not induced) found, early, before she was old enough for much of Shakespeare, or could understand Wordsworth in his profundity, at least one satisfying object. Thomson influenced her by becoming part of her thought.

Charlotte had returned home for a short vacation in May,<sup>1</sup> and for the longer midsummer vacation; and the house had seemed suddenly smaller because fuller, and she and her sisters more than ever like what Mary Taylor called potatoes grown in a cellar.<sup>2</sup> Again political issues sparked into a fire of disputation. Mr. Brontë, from a stout Tory, had gradually become an advocate of conservative reform in Church and State, being "fully convinced that unless the *real* friends of our excellent institutions come forward . . . the inveterate enemies will avail themselves of the opportunity . . . so as to . . . bring about a revolution."<sup>3</sup> Charlotte,

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 89.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 91.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 85.

as a loyal-unto-death henchman of the Duke of Wellington, who had recently fallen from power, took sides against her father, and at breakfast and tea the battle raged. "Ah," Charlotte could say in the summer of 1831, "but the Reform Bill was thrown out of the House of Lords, and Lord Grey resigned—or was expelled." This was very hard on Mr. Brontë. He was accustomed to being right, and fond of the eminence.<sup>1</sup>

It is not known what Emily thought about politics at this time. Perhaps she shared the family passion. Certainly the party intrigues of her day had the virtue of being dramatic.

But there were other dramas more significant to Emily: the shiftings of clouds in the sky, the struggle between light and shadow on the hills, the counter-urges within her breast.

Charlotte went back to Roe Head in the autumn and at Christmas came again, and left again; and the first part of 1832 wore away, and late in July Charlotte, top-heavy with eighteen months of education, returned to "the little wild moorland village where we reside" (her slightly supercilious description), unpacked her things (including a prize New Testament in French, a silver medal, and a black ribbon worn in the style of the Order of the Garter)' and settled down to the old régime.

Emily was glad to see her; the tie of blood binds close. Yet it seemed rather rude, this intrusion on her dreams. Charlotte, Papa said, must now share her advantage by teaching the younger girls what she had learned—that was only fair. And since Emily had such an aversion to going off to school herself, it was highly advisable. Didn't she want to learn? Yes, she wanted to learn. But there were other ways of learning than from books.

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 88.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 97.

## IX

### EMILY AS CHARLOTTE'S PUPIL

CHARLOTTE was a natural-born school-teacher. At her worst she was pettily exacting; at her best glorious. Always she strove conscientiously to improve herself and conscientiously to impart. In the summer of 1832, though only sixteen, she was temperamentally a spinster. Maintaining that necessity forced enough hard practical knowledge into the mind, her life's policy was to burnish brass till it shone yellow, and then, when possible, pick up scraps and filings of true gold: information about painting, sculpture, music and poetry. In cultivating her taste she was assiduous and persevering. It was not an unworthy ideal: it was merely plebeianly derivative in comparison with Emily's never-formulated and original one, which was, not to appropriate from other people, but to dredge up the treasure sunk within her heart. Charlotte brilliantly observed, remembered and analyzed character. But "neither Emily nor Anne was learned; they had no thought of filling their pitchers at the well-spring of other minds."<sup>1</sup> Partially true, Charlotte. But as she grew older Emily did better than that: she amalgamated her bits of knowledge; with poetic insight saw unobvious, basic forces and relationships—those intangibles of heaven and earth, beyond the dreamings of philosophy, which Hamlet mentioned to Horatio. For this reason Emily's spirit was not completely in tune with her teacher Charlotte. But Emily at fourteen was too securely herself to be swerved in her course. She submitted to instruction—learned the rudiments of French and the involvements of grammar—without giving the smallest piece, the least fragment of herself, away. It required a difficult technique. Nor was there anyone to admire, for no one knew.<sup>2</sup>

The days were all servilely alike. In the morning from nine till half-past twelve Emily and Anne sat figuratively at Charlotte's feet; then took a short walk before dinner; in the afternoon Aunt had her inning and they sewed or darned or crocheted, snipping the threads with a pair of blunted scissors,<sup>3</sup> since Mr. Brontë permitted no sharp-pointed ones in the house; till it was time to stow the thin-paper embroidery patterns, pins for lace-making and reels of cotton back into a Morocco work-case.<sup>3</sup> They had tea from a porce-

<sup>1</sup> Biographical Notice.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 89-92.

<sup>3</sup> Museum.

lain tea service which consisted of tea-pot, cream-jug, slop-bowl, and six cups and saucers, intertwined with painted figures and flowers;<sup>1</sup> and used Charlotte's creation of a red-flannel tea-cosy stitched with yellow braid and lined with heliotrope.<sup>1</sup> Then they read or wrote or played at Angria and Gondaland, or dawdled, till the small oil lamp<sup>1</sup> was lit.

The interruptions were almost as dismal as the routine. Once in a while they had company, some clergyman hailing from afar, who was closeted with Papa; and one Tuesday late this July they entertained at tea all the female teachers of the Sunday School.<sup>2</sup> Emily was too reserved to care for these goings-on; or relish trudging out to tea with Charlotte to the home of a wealthy manufacturer on the outskirts of Keighley.<sup>3</sup> She had no friends, and did not try to make any. "My sister's disposition was not naturally gregarious," Charlotte wrote later. "Except to go to church or take a walk on the hills, she rarely crossed the threshold of home. Though her feeling for the people around was benevolent, intercourse with them she never sought; nor, with very few exceptions, ever experienced. And yet she knew them: knew their ways, their language, their family histories; she could hear of them with interest and talk of them with detail, minute, graphic, and accurate; but with them she rarely exchanged a word."<sup>4</sup> Thus her tremendously emotional nature was starved, being asked to feast on dry academics. There was bound to be trouble.

For a long time Emily who craved love had imagined she was not loved. In a sense it was true. She was not actively valued; she was taken more or less for granted; she was a little despaired of, because, as she grew older, she was queerer—less like other folks—an amazing mixture of humility and pride; and to the family unfathomable as the sea. She laid on herself the lowliest tasks and performed them without complaining; yet confided in her flesh and blood not at all—as if they were not good enough! As a child she had been naughty and high-spirited, brooking no repression and flaring up rather easily; now, they sensed, she only seemed to bend, to cede, to capitulate, patiently pushing her small smoothing iron<sup>1</sup> up and down the board, making bread, cleaning, dusting—while in subtle rebellion. If they did not understand her, it was partly her fault. She

<sup>1</sup> Museum.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 103.

<sup>3</sup> Haworth tradition.

<sup>4</sup> Preface to 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights*.

did less and less to make them understand her—and understanding is love.

Naturally her loneliness was greater some times than others; but at its worst it ate her heart out. To conceal a morbid and quivering sensitivity she did what many a poet has done—shielded her nakedness with a cloak of indifference. No suffering is more terrible than the half-groundless suffering of adolescents, for they have no reserve of indifference. In silence hers was elaborated; in silence soured to resentment. She was a girl, though she had the energy and will-to-freedom of a boy; she was not elect. Nevertheless she was stubborn; nothing and no one could kill the strength in her. If her family did not esteem what she was, she would never give them the satisfaction of knowing she cared. The idea gripped her that they made her a partial outcast, so she made herself a complete one.

This tendency toward black despondency was nourished by many of the books which she read, but especially by Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1827, bound in half-leather, which her father, perhaps urged by his own recurrent dejection, had recently acquired. Because it was written in first-class style, its ideas had more power over her. "Naught so sweet as melancholy," said the author's abstract. And later, "Every man hath a good and a bad angel attending on him in particular, all his life long." Ah, it was so, it was so; she had proof in her own being! "What can't be cured must be endured." She was prepared to endure her spiritual exile till the day of her death. What day would that be? what hour?—how mysterious was the future! "And this is that Homer's golden chain, which reacheth down from heaven to earth, by which every creature is annexed, and depends on his Creator." As a mystic she felt that bond; but as a rationalist girded her mind to challenge, with the belligerence of youth, accepted dogma. It is not likely that Emily in her fifteenth year partook without a qualm of the sacraments of the Church of England. She was feeling after something larger which antedated man-made forms. "One religion is as true as another." She already perceived wherein that statement was right and wherein wrong. Every religion which had satisfied the spiritual need of a large body of people for a long time reflected some, though not all, of the eternal truth. When she went through ritualistic gestures on Sunday, she knew them as no more than valuable symbols—and had a sly reservation or two in

her young, sad, ironic mind. Thus melancholy, like adversity, had its uses. It gave her a wry vision while marking her for its own.

The point was, she craved heightened emotion, and, failing great love, rejected a small loneliness as insufficient, opening her cloak to a loneliness so great it devoured her vitals like a ravening wolf. It was her pride which said, Nothing half-way; nothing lukewarm; overwhelm me with either joy or sorrow. Everyone who looks deep enough into himself knows what he is. Emily Brontë began to suspect what she was, and instinctively put from her a mediocre fate, moving toward the darkly grand. At any cost she would have a large experience. Incidentally this was, among other considerations, a way to outwit and beat Branwell, darling of fortune. Let him monopolize all light, as son and heir; she would accept all darkness—and who could say that his triumph would be more dramatically complete than hers? She thought of the suffering creature within her as the gender she coveted—male. And gradually, it appears from the evidence, she came to love this bleak manifestation of her soul: her alter-ego:

Never has a blue streak  
Cleft the clouds since morn;  
Never has his grim fate  
Smiled since he was born.

Frowning on the infant,  
Shadowing childhood's joy,  
Guardian-angel knows not  
That melancholy boy.

Day is passing swiftly  
In sad and sombre prime;  
Boyhood sad is merging  
In sadder manhood's time. . . .<sup>1</sup>

This is characteristic of dejection: when in the ascendancy it seems always to have been; its beginning can no more be remembered than its end envisioned. It carries with it a false sense of eternity.

But in her fifteenth year, if Emily thought too much about her mother and two older sisters dying young, and about Cowan Bridge, and about her unloved state, and reached the conclusion that she had never been happy, she deceived herself. She had been and was occasionally still

<sup>1</sup> "The Two Children," May 28, 1845.

happy—and when happy, freely and gloriously happy, out-topping all others in the vehemence of her bliss. For she was the other extreme from phlegmatic; she soared, or she was sunk; she did not know how to walk unimaginatively and evenly on a dull earth.

The family, whom she loved in spite of wounds from fancied neglect, had a way of making her forget, every now and then, her secret grudge. For example, in November Branwell acquired a flute and a board-bound manuscript music-book arranged for flute-playing,<sup>1</sup> and filled the house with the sad sweet notes of twenty-one airs. Loving music, she was enchanted by some of the sounds which issued from the stops in the tubular wind-instrument; and eagerly forgave her rival his flats for the sake of a flood of melody pitched true. Perhaps, experimenting with the flute herself, it was now she asked for a pianoforte.

In her love of music she showed Yorkshire breeding. Though rude, her neighbours had singularly good musical taste, knowing their Handel, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, and training excellent choruses and bands. Thomas Parker, "the Yorkshire Brahms" from Haworth, who not only sang superb tenor but had a refined musical perception, was forty-five this year 1832, and Emily must have known him.<sup>2</sup>

Anything unusual was a god-send. But Charlotte's September visit to her friend Ellen Nussey at The Rydings, Birstall, was peculiarly lucky—it postponed Emily's and Anne's lessons for fifteen days. Branwell was sent along in the two-wheeled gig, as escort, and on seeing the imposing battlements, the rookery, the pruned acres, the fine old chestnut trees (the one split by storms and "iron-garthed" fascinated him) cried: "I am leaving you in paradise, and if you are not intensely happy, you never will be." On Charlotte's return from the "plantations" she had wonderful tales to tell: about herself and "*dear dear dear Ellen*" seeking the seclusion of the fruit garden; about being led into dinner by a stranger and out of shyness bursting into tears; about Ellen Nussey's Great-uncle Reuben Walker being a distinguished Court physician—till Emily the unworldly smiled privately and ironically (though with pleasure too) at what *some* folk were impressed by.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Museum.

<sup>2</sup> Gaskell, 32-33. Branwell Bronte, we are told, especially loved oratorio and Handel.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 106, 107.



Charlotte's friendship with Ellen Nussey thrived because in many respects they were cut from the same piece of cloth. "I know you have too much good sense and right feeling," Charlotte wrote, "not to strive earnestly for your own improvement. . . . I was very much disappointed at your not sending the hair; you may be sure, my dearest Ellen, that I would not grudge double postage to obtain it, but I must offer the same excuse for not sending you any" <sup>1</sup>—presumably to enshrine in a locket. In October, for the sake of self-improvement, the friends were corresponding in French. Charlotte says that when she arrived home in perfect safety her "little sisters" (Emily was considerably taller than she) ran out of the house to see the carriage, and embraced her with great fervour, as if she had been absent for a year; and that she gave her sisters the apples sent with so much generosity and the recipients were sure Miss Nussey was very agreeable and good, and were "extremely impatient" to see her (well, *one* part of Emily was). Charlotte "begged and implored" her "*très chère amie*" to answer in "the universal language." Poor Emily could not have enjoyed great prestige with Charlotte, for she knew only a smattering of French and could not possibly have written a French letter.

You must study, you must try, you must practise, Charlotte urged during class-hours. Emily was docile: she did what was required of her, knowing she would get more freedom if she did not demand it. She got a good deal, in secret. But sometimes she had to go as lightly—to quote her Robert Burton—as if she trod on eggs. And with none more than with Charlotte, who had a terrible tendency to regulate other people's lives. A Prunty uncle who visited the Brontës in later years characterized her as "tarrible sharp and inquisitive." <sup>2</sup> Sometimes Emily must have felt like bolting the tight circle of her academic ministrations and slamming the door behind. But sometimes human fellowship drew them close. "You very kindly caution me," Charlotte wrote to Ellen in January 1833, "against being tempted by the fondness of my sisters"—a fondness she had reported herself, for Ellen had seen neither Emily nor Anne—"to consider myself of too much importance." <sup>3</sup>

About this time Mr. Brontë was so pleased with his children's drawings and water-colours he procured a teacher for

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 103.

<sup>2</sup> Mackay, 140.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 108.

them, Mr. William Robinson of Leeds. Now they talked about mass, composition, chiaroscuro and perspective in professional terms. How exciting Mr. Robinson's periodical knock on the front door; and after he had gone, what painstaking efforts to excel. Branwell, praised the most, was given a special room, the spare one behind Papa's, to paint in—which is odd, since the few extant works by Emily show less imitation.

Branwell, fancying himself a potentially famous portrait-painter, took furiously to oils and a graver. Having no other models he used his sisters, and when one picture turned out bad, tried another. Of the few still extant the earliest is the "gun group," which exists not in the original but as a photograph of an engraving. It was considered good enough to have a print made. As a matter of fact it could scarcely be more amateurish. Yet in a rough way the individuals correspond to reliable descriptions. Branwell the bushy-pated, swathed in a stock, clasps a gun with which he is supposed to have just shot the game on the table. To his left is small and meek Anne, with a nose bridged rather high between the eyes, and loose hair; to his right, Charlotte, dumpy and hook-nosed, with an unbeautiful mouth, but intelligent-looking; and then Emily, taller than her sisters, long-necked and large-eyed, with an erect posture, and hair less frizzed than Charlotte's, hanging in free ringlets. All three of the girls' necks are encircled by pleated ruffles.<sup>1</sup>

Between posings and lessons they read *Kenilworth*,<sup>2</sup> probably borrowed from the Mechanics' Institute in Keighley and toted four miles under the arm. What the grim fate of Amy Robsart meant to Emily can only be conjectured, but it was no more awful than the stories Tabby told around the fire, of the savage deeds of inbred gentry. Death was something one could never get away from. Why, there were ancient graves under their back-kitchen!

Spring was distinguished by the usual outcropping of influenza. "We have so far," Charlotte wrote Ellen, "steered clear of it, but I know not how long we may continue to escape."

The discrepancy between Charlotte's knowledge and her sister's had decreased, and lessons were falling off. Emily was not sorry. Now she could spend her mornings on the

<sup>1</sup> The identifications are made certain by Ellen Nussey's initialling of each person.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 109.

moors, and if the day was fine, swing over the hills to the waterfall, on whose edge grew ling, and fern, and long grass—the first clean bright green of spring. She stood there listening to the rush of augmented waters, watching the weavings of light.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 112.

## X

### MISS NUSSEY'S FIRST VISIT

IN June Charlotte wrote Ellen:

"Aunt thought it would be better to defer your visit till the middle of the Summer, as the Winter, and even the Spring seasons are remarkably cold and bleak among our mountains. Papa now desires me to present his respects to Mrs. Nussey and say that he would feel greatly obliged if she would allow us the pleasure of your company for a few weeks at Haworth. I will leave it to you to fix whatever day may be most convenient but dear Ellen let it be an *early* one." <sup>1</sup>

So Ellen, the pretty and correct young friend, packed up her clothes. The scenery she was driven through on the way to Haworth was not like her own gentle Birstall, but wild and uncultivated. Down a "terrific hill" the horses had to be led; then started up a wall-like incline, their feet "catching at boulders, as if climbing." The main street of the village seemed blind, but an exit was pointed out, no wider than the gig, and then a grey church loomed, and a short narrow lane conducted to the Parsonage. Charlotte had heard the roll of wheels and run to the gate. *Ah!*

Mr. Brontë, after bowing to Miss Nussey, saw to it that her man-servant and horse were made comfortable. How long had the good fellow been with the Nusseys, pray? This is my Aunt, Miss Branwell. Aunt was all solicitude. Was Miss Nussey tired? She could put her bonnet here. Anne came forward shyly. And then a very tall girl.

"This," said Charlotte (or similar words), "is Emily."

The tall girl had a lithe and graceful figure. Her hair, which was naturally fine, was frizzed unbecomingly around a rather sallow face. But two very beautiful eyes spoke out with meaning: liquid and compassionate; and when they glanced up—which was not often—seemed reservoirs of light. Their colour varied from dark grey to deep blue. Ellen said of her, later: "Few people have the gift of looking and smiling, as she could look and smile—one of her rare expressive looks was something to remember through life, there was such a *depth* of soul and feeling, and yet

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 109.

shyness of revealing herself, a strength of self-containment seen in no other. . . ." She said little.<sup>1</sup>

The house, always neat, fairly shone this day. Ellen was the first house-guest the sisters had ever entertained. Would she who lived at a great country-seat find the Rectory cramped, bare, and inconvenient? It is not likely that the Brontës committed the vulgarity of being ashamed of their home, but undoubtedly they had scurried, rearranged and polished.

Where should Ellen sleep? It would have been undignified for Aunt at her age to retreat from the best bedroom, which she regularly shared with Anne. Branwell may have objected to changing from the little room at the right of the stairs to Papa's again. When Maria and Elizabeth were alive and Mamma was sick, five little girls had slept in the children's study. Could not three big ones sleep there now? They could—but Emily had sensibilities too delicate to intrude on bosom friends. While Charlotte and Ellen whispered far into the night, she bundled up and went and slept in the little room over the peat-room, with Tabby the servant.<sup>2</sup>

The whole family was conquered by Ellen of the pale-marble serenity, brown eyes and dark hair, sitting upright and motionless in a black dress and white scarf, with her little watch tucked in at her belt. If she was, as Charlotte said later, "no more than a conscientious, observant, calm, well-bred Yorkshire girl," that was precisely what they admired.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Brontë bestowed his courtly presence more freely than usual. He took out his cream silk handkerchief.<sup>4</sup> Miss Branwell began her hintings about having been the belle of Penzance; took a pinch of snuff; and offered the pretty gold snuff-box to Miss Nussey—with a tinkle of a laugh, coquettishly, enjoying the shock.<sup>5</sup> Tabby was soon high-handedly classing the newcomer with her "childer" and "bairns" and ordering her about.<sup>6</sup> No doubt Branwell, as a gesture of friendliness, rendered his best numbers on the flute; perhaps even demonstrated how he could take two pens and write two letters at once.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 110–116; II, 273–274.

<sup>2</sup> Robinson, 68.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 121, 141; IV, 251; and an old photograph of Ellen Nussey as a school-girl.

<sup>4</sup> Museum.

<sup>5</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 111.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 112.

<sup>7</sup> The reminiscence of the son of John Brown the sexton. (*Chambers' Journal*, 1868.)

He and his sisters escorted Ellen to the moors, showing her their favourite spots. Walking was easy in their laced cloth boots with square toes and low heels.<sup>1</sup>

Here in wild open places the last vestiges of company manners faded, and they were uncontrollably themselves. Emily, Anne and Branwell, peeling off their shoes and stockings, forded the stream; and lugged and arranged stepping-stones for the older, more sedate girls; and laughed, and cried out with delight, and called each other's attention to tufts of moss, lowers, and changing hues and lovely shapes. Even little sleepy-looking Anne, with the light-brown curls, the eyes like violets, the pencilled brows and white transparent skin woke up and was human.<sup>2</sup>

But Emily was the revelation. Her cold reserve departed out of her, and a puckish quality entered in. Ellen wrote later: "On the top of a moor or in a deep glen Emily was a child in spirit of glee and enjoyment, or when thrown entirely on her own resources to do a kindness. She could be vivacious in conversation and enjoy giving pleasure—A spell of mischief also lurked in her on occasions, when out on the moors—She enjoyed leading Charlotte where she would not dare go of her own free will—C. had a mortal dread of unknown animals and it was Emily's pleasure to lead her into close vicinity and then to tell her of what she had done, laughing at her horror with great amusement." One day Emily led them all on a ramble to what she and Anne called "The Meeting of the Waters," an emerald-turfed island around which bubbled clear springs; and demonstrated how to cling to seats on large flat stones and be hidden from all the world—nothing visible . . . nothing . . . except miles of mauve heather and a massive bright arc of sky. Half-reclining on her smooth slab, Emily played like a young child with the tadpoles in the cold water, her hand darting after the sleek darting bodies, her spirit feeling the ecstasy of the chase; and began to moralize on the strong and the weak, the brave and the cowardly.<sup>3</sup>

One could not believe, back at the Parsonage, that this Emily and that other Emily were the same person.

Though the sobering influence of the grey Parsonage was not difficult to understand. All was excessively tidy. There was not a curtain or drapery in the house because of Mr. Brontë's fear of fire. There was not a carpet, except

<sup>1</sup> Museum.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 112, 113.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 112, 113; II, 273, 274.

on the non-inflammable stone floors of parlour and study. The sand-stone was immaculately clean; the walls stained a circumspect dove colour. The chairs had hair-seats, the book-shelves were plain; candles were used but charily, and not wax ones—tallow. Everything was calculated. In the morning (but this too by schedule) Mr. Brontë discharged the night's pistol-loading from his bedroom window. It was a signal. No lying a-bed in *his* house. That night at eight o'clock sharp he assembled the household for family worship; at nine locked and barred the front door; a moment later called to the "children" in the parlour not to sit up late; wound the clock, laid out his gold watch, loaded his pistol—and the day was done. Were rash acts suitable in such a setting? But just as Ellen received from the house, in spite of its sobriety, an impression if not of elegance at least of refinement, so, from the habits of its inmates, in spite of their punctiliousness she received a distinct impression of something unpredictable in their characters. Mr. Brontë related marvellous stories which made the blood run chill. Tabby lifted up her voice and warbled strange songs. And a look came upon Emily's face—a look. . . . Even Ellen, who was not astute, saw that this house was not as other houses; that these people conformed the least when they seemed the most to conform.

Having a sick-headache Charlotte was unable to take Ellen out one day; but to their surprise Emily, whose dislike of strangers had always been violent, volunteered for that office. On their return from the moors, Charlotte was nervous. "How did Emily behave?" she asked eagerly, as soon as she could get Ellen aside. Why, Emily had been very very nice, said Ellen in surprise.<sup>1</sup>

On Sunday it was necessary for the visitor to put in an appearance at Church and be examined covertly by the populace. She was as busy observing as they were, but with a technique less obtrusive. She saw the stolidity of the congregation during prayers; some almost went to sleep and had to be "knobbed" by the sexton with a long staff; children in clogs pattered in from the Sunday School, and out again. But when the sermon began, she saw a great change. For the first time the audience cocked their ears forward. Emotions shifted like shadows across rough, strong faces of untaught intelligence: doubt, bewilderment,

<sup>1</sup> Robinson, 71, 72.

defiance, and then—like beams of light—hope. Standing between two brass candelabra,<sup>1</sup> Mr. Brontë preached extempore, giving his natural eloquence free rein; not unmindful that the great Wesley had made a reputation for impassioned utterances in this very pulpit some forty years ago. Perhaps on this Sunday too he selected a parable from one of the Gospels and carefully brought it down to the rudest comprehension. Not that all the parishioners were ignorant: one, though suffering from constant ailments, could bring forceful criticism to bear, and another, of giant frame, vied with Mr. Brontë himself in his mastery of dead languages. But wise or dull, they respected t'Parson. "He's a grand man," one said; "he lets other folks' business alone." So Ellen sat under her best bonnet in the Brontë pew that had a little swinging wooden door, and was spied on and estimated, and drew her conclusions.<sup>2</sup>

The days went much too fast.

One day Branwell hired the two-wheeled gig and drove the four girls through peaceful Crimsworth Dene to Hardcastle Crag, where ranks of tall pines stand sentinel over romantic Hebden River Valley. On another day it seems they made an excursion to Bolton Abbey near Ilkley, among beautifully wooded hills on the banks of the Wharfe: a fine example of Norman and (in the perfect nave) twelfth-century English architecture.<sup>3</sup> The Brontës had a special interest in venerable half-ruins: they had been drawing them for years.

To prove this, they must have shown Ellen their pictures—perhaps not Emily (she was loath to exhibit herself), but Charlotte, Branwell and, when urged, Anne. Ellen examined Branwell's life-size three-quarter oil-painting of the three sisters, framed and hung above the stairs. At the time it was executed Emily had been about fifteen. Like Charlotte and Anne, she looks older than in the "gun" picture; but there is the same full mouth, broad brow, and fine and finely-placed eyes. Charlotte stands on one side of a pillar and Emily and Anne (as is fitting) on the other. Their hair is cropped. They have taken off the neck-ruffles and donned wide puritan collars. The skirts of their dresses bell out; the waists are belted; the sleeves gigot. The faces do not look happy—but that may be a defect of Branwell's art; and who is happy after hours

<sup>1</sup> Museum.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 115, 116.

<sup>3</sup> Simpson, 40, 41.



of posing? Ellen gasped properly, and paid pretty compliments. The wonder to her was not that Branwell could not paint better, but that he could paint at all. He's considering attending the Royal Academy, the sisters explained—for indeed he had talked of it.<sup>1</sup>

But at last the visitor (now almost a member of the family) packed her travelling-case and said good-bye. Her brothers George and Richard, who called for her, planned to break the seventeen-mile ride home at an inn—perhaps the Bull's Head in Bradford.<sup>2</sup> It being summer and not cold the Brontës crowded to the gate and waved. It is surprising that Emily who never made friends got on so well with this in no way distinguished outsider. But perhaps that was the very reason—Ellen was home-like and did not offend her austere reserve. So Emily, standing taller than her sisters, waved too. Good-bye, Ellen; come again; good-bye!

Some days later Charlotte dispatched a letter to Birstall:

“Were I to tell you of the impression you made on every one here, you would accuse me of flattery. Papa and Aunt are continually adducing you as an example for me to shape my actions and behaviour by, Emily and Anne say ‘they never saw any one they liked so well as Miss Nussey’, and Tabby whom you have absolutely fascinated talks a great deal more nonsense about your Ladyship than I choose to report.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Simpson, 205; Gaskell, 135; and the portrait in the National Gallery, London.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 117.

## XI

### ST. ANTHONY'S FIRE

JUST after Ellen's departure, Emily suffered a severe attack of erysipelas or St. Anthony's fire. This is no proof of constitutional weakness, since erysipelas is a streptococci infection, endemic in some vicinities, which requires only a skin abrasion to commence wicked warfare. The red patch slightly raised at the edges spreads day by day, almost invariably announced by high fever and sometimes by delirium. The seat of Emily's infection was her arm. The sore had to be lanced to remove an accumulation of noxious matter. There is no record of what doctor was summoned and she had to put up with. Anæsthesia as a method of avoiding pain was not yet practised, even locally. Fully conscious, Emily had to thrust her arm out for the sharp benevolence of the knife.<sup>1</sup> All the evidence of her life shows her to have been a person of remarkable courage. It is not possible, therefore, that she flinched.

The spreading fiery rose on her arm was accompanied — unromantically—by liver complaint, and the two, as might be expected, caused great debility. Contagious erysipelas proves little; but biliousness would seem to indicate that at this time her general health was not very good. Which is surprising. Though living next to the pollution of an ancient graveyard and exposed to the unhealthy environment and fever epidemic of Cowan Bridge, she remained hale and strong from the age of five to the age of fifteen. As a small child, during her mother's last illness, she had had scarlet fever along with her four sisters and brother; and the summer before being sent off to school may have suffered, with the others, from a complication of measles and whooping-cough—but that record, for a child, in a town where the yearly death-rate was, at a conservative estimate, one in every fifty, is singularly clear. Certainly whatever killed Maria and Elizabeth she had been exposed to and withstood.<sup>2</sup>

Is there a connection between the fact that a usually healthy person was suddenly sick and the fact that during the whole of the previous year, owing to lessons under Charlotte, she had walked outdoors in the hills less than

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 117; *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 59, 73, 74; Wilson, 8.

her wont; less than her wont associating with linnets and larks and plovers and white-breasted sea-mews blown inland by the gales? From a physical standpoint (there was that sallow complexion) she seems to have particularly needed exercise; but more than this, being confined meant inevitably, for her, being unhappy, and (as is now generally accepted in the medical profession) the mind reacts upon the body, the two being inseparable. It is not meant to over-emphasize this possibility. Undoubtedly other facts entered into Emily's sickness: perhaps puberty had something to do with it; perhaps an injudicious diet (though a surfeit of rich foods, the usual cause of liver trouble, could never be charged to the Parson's table); perhaps a cold in the digestive organs; perhaps nervousness over the presence, however pleasant, of a guest in the house. Nevertheless it seems likely that the biliousness was caused at least in part by her comparatively long-continued exile from the moors—which in deed and in truth were her life and her breath.

But the red field on her arm diminished; by September her health was definitely mending; she had only to suffer a few more waning attacks <sup>1</sup> (a characteristic of both erysipelas and biliousness) and was whole again. It is assumed that she lost no time in swinging on to the moors. By that time frost had bitten the purple heather and turned it brown.

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 117.



Portrait of Emily Brontë by Patrick Branwell Brontë. See Note, page 371.

*(National Portrait Gallery )*



## XII

### STRANGE RIPENING

TIME has left but a shadowy chronicle of Emily's next two years; she must be approached obliquely; and it must be remembered that then, no less than at any other time, she was living, she was real; she had a physical presence and a spiritual hope; she got up in the morning and dressed herself; she dreamed, thought, sat down at the table and asked for another helping of potatoes; navigated her toy-like smoothing iron (it was scarcely three inches long)<sup>1</sup> over a wrapped board; threaded needles; hurried to get to church on time; walked swiftly down the cobbled lane, swiftly, swiftly through the stiles, and fled (from what?) on to the thick, springy, mattress-like grass, now green, now dry, of the everlasting and stoic moors.

The winter of 1833-34 was unusual: little frost or snow, but sluices and sluices of rain, and a wind that would not die. In consequence of the extreme wetness there was much sickness in and round about Haworth, and in Haworth churchyard an unprecedented number of funerals—melancholy last offices to the dead which the occupants of the Parsonage could not avoid witnessing. Across the lane, in a shed, they heard John Brown the mason chipping a new gravestone, and then a bell rang leaden and heavy, and then they heard a clearer ringing—the spade's—and saw the stooped procession. It was a miracle how ingenuity could cram another body into that burying-ground, used since the sixteenth century and bristling with tombstones—the supine sort, propped on four legs, like marble and uncomfortable beds which perverse sleepers chose not to lie on but to lie under.<sup>2</sup>

Emily tried to amuse herself with sketching Ginger, her dog,<sup>3</sup> in January, but again gloom settled down.

When the Brontë young ladies (girls no longer) walked out on to the moors it was like stepping on a sponge.

"I trust sincerely," Charlotte wrote Ellen, with little regard for punctuation, "that your medical adviser is mistaken in supposing you have any tendency to pulmonary affection, *dear* Ellen that would indeed be a calamity. I have seen enough of Consumption, to dread it as one of the

<sup>1</sup> Museum.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 118.

<sup>3</sup> For a reproduction, see *The Woman at Home*, August, 1897.

most insidious, and fatal diseases incident to humanity, but I repeat it I *hope* nay pray that your alarm is groundless." Then she offered a potion of advice which may have poured from the bottle the more easily for having, a short time before, been shaken up for Emily: "If you remember I used frequently to tell you . . . that you were constitutionally *nervous*—guard against the gloomy impressions which such a state of mind naturally produces, cheer up, take constant and regular exercise and all I doubt not will yet be well." Charlotte was in her element when administering advice. But she herself being often depressed that winter, it was a case of "physician, heal thyself."<sup>1</sup>

In February the sisters had the vicarious pleasure of Ellen's first trip to London. Excitement reached a high pitch in Charlotte, and the imaginations of Emily and Anne, in imitation and by reflection, warmed to a glow. Charlotte, hungering to see "the splendours and novelties of that great city," dispatched a pathetic epistolary effusion: "Did you not feel awed while gazing at St. Paul's and Westminster Abbey? had you no feelings of intense, and ardent interest, when in St. James's you saw the Palace, where so many of England's Kings, had held their courts, and beheld the representations of their persons on the walls. . . . Have you yet seen any of the Great Personages whom the sitting of Parliament now detains in London? The Duke of Wellington, Sir Robert Peel, Earl Grey, Mr. Stanley, Mr. O'Connell, &c.?" And after more talk, and "C. Brontë," she flew to add a postscript: "P.S.—Will you be kind enough to inform me of the number of performers in the Kings Military Band? Branwell wishes for this information." In June Ellen returned from "the great city which . . . is almost as apocryphal as Babylon or Nineveh, or ancient Rome"—and Charlotte was astonished that she was "unchanged . . . uncontaminated."<sup>2</sup>

Did Emily wish she had a friend she could address as "My *own* dear"? For all her constrained taciturnity she had been a warm-blooded child and carried warm-blooded instincts into her maturity. But reticence hardens into a habit and condemns to loneliness. How human if Emily, self-frustrated in her longing for a friend, pretended to herself, sometimes, that she would not have one on any account—human beings were frail reeds to lean on. But she could

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 118.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 119, 120.

not have fooled herself always. There come moments of blinding sight when even our self-deceptions are made plain. Of course she had speaking-acquaintances in and out of Haworth; in her rôle as Parson's daughter she was civil. But none of these people existed on her mental level, and so any vital fellowship was impossible. And of course she had Anne. But Anne was a friend by omission rather than commission. She was a quiet companion and faithful follower, she played the Gondal game passably, and applauded sweetly when Emily invented situations. But she was not Emily's peer; could not understand Emily's deeper thoughts; at best was an unstimulating substitute for the friend Emily should have had.

Summer rolled around again, this one the summer Emily turned sixteen. Assuming that what book one in the house read, all read, Emily regaled herself that summer on Greek history at the time of the Persian Wars, and became conversant with Xerxes of "insatiate eye," and with "base Trachinian" who showed the Persians a secret mountain path that they might fall on the rear of the Greek defenders of the pass of Thermopylæ. Did this betrayal affect her as profoundly as it did Branwell, author of a poem on the subject?

On July 4 Charlotte received from Ellen a bonnet "pretty, neat and simple, as like the Giver as possible"; and in return sent some really good advice: <sup>1</sup>

"You ask me to recommend some books for your perusal. . . . If you like poetry let it be first rate, Milton, Shakespeare, Thomson, Goldsmith, Pope (if you will though I don't admire him) Scott, Byron, Campbell, Wordsworth and Southey. Now Ellen don't be startled at the names of Shakespeare and Byron. Both these were great men and their works are like themselves, you will know how to choose the good and avoid the evil, the finest passages are always the purest, the bad are invariably revolting you will never wish to read them over twice. Omit the Comedies of Shakespeare and the Don Juan, perhaps the Cain of Byron though the latter is a magnificent Poem and read the rest fearlessly. That must indeed be a depraved mind which can gather evil from Henry the 8th from Richard 3rd from Macbeth and Hamlet and Julius Caesar, Scott's sweet, wild romantic Poetry can do you no harm nor can Wordsworth nor Campbell's nor Southey's, the greater part at least of his, some is certainly exceptional. For History read Hume, Rollin, and

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 121.



the Universal History if you can—I never did. For fiction—read Scott alone; all novels after his are worthless. For biography, read Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, Southey's *Life of Nelson*, Lockhart's *Life of Burns*, Moore's *Life of Sheridan*, Moore's *Life of Byron*, Wolfe's *Remains*. For Natural History, read Bewick, Audubon, and Goldsmith and White. . . . I only say adhere to standard authors and don't run after novelty." <sup>1</sup>

Though this list doubtless represents part of Emily's reading as well as Charlotte's, it does not follow that the appended ideas were also Emily's. Being less squeamish, she probably loved Shakespeare without a ghost of an apology, understanding that even bawdiness has a place, if properly subordinated in the whole. If she had a Complete Shakespeare or a Collected Byron in her hands, it is not possible that she omitted the *Comedies* or *Don Juan* or *Cain*; or blenched. The interest of the young Brontës in the lives of the great was tremendous, hero worship being no small factor in their rare development. Their reading in biography could hardly have been better, unless they had added (as perhaps they did) Plutarch, Diogenes Laertius, Suetonius, Boccaccio's *Dante*, Vasari, Roper's *Life of Sir Thomas More*, Cavendish's *Wolsey*, Aubrey's *Minutes of Lives*, Lord Herbert of Cherbury's *Autobiography*, the Duchess of Newcastle on her husband, and Roger North on his three brothers. Their penchant for books on natural history suggests that Emily's love of the outdoors was not unenlightened: that she knew the stages through which the earth had passed, and the species of animals, and relations between them. (Darwin had not yet spoken.) But why was not Cuvier included, who believed that the earth had been destroyed several times before man was created? This is not the only question. Would Emily have written, as Charlotte did: "For fiction—read Scott alone"? Not Fanny Hurney's *Evalina*? Not Jane Austen? Not Smollett's *Peregrine Pickle*? Not Richardson's *Clarissa*? Not Fielding's *Tom Jones*? Not Sterne's marvellous *Tristram Shandy*? Emily would have been bound to like the forthrightness of *Tristram Shandy*. As for the poets, Emily loved them even more than Charlotte. Perhaps she would not have omitted from her list of first-rate poets (though Charlotte's omissions may have been oversights rather than marks of distaste): Chaucer,

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 122.

Milton, Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Donne, Dryden, Burns, Cowper (whom, there is reason to believe, from *Shirley*, they all particularly liked), Blake (that titan, whose obscure life had closed in 1827, but whom she may never have heard of), Keats, and Shelley (who had been dead ten or twelve years), and Coleridge (who, having so much for her, had died this very year). Did the Mechanics' Library in Keighley yield these up? Did she know them and cherish them? And forgetting the poets, what of Sir Thomas Browne? Emily would have responded instantly to "Man is a noble animal, splendid in ashes and pompous in the grave," and been ravished by the beautifully sententious periods of the *Urn Burial*. She would have distinguished between that majesty and what Charlotte called "Cobbett's lucubrations,"<sup>1</sup> catching the true adumbration.

In November, 1834, Charlotte answered Ellen's question as to whether she considered dancing objectionable when indulged in for an hour or two in parties of boys and girls. "It is allowed on all hands," Charlotte wrote, "that the sin of dancing consists not in the mere action of shaking the shanks (as the Scotch say), but in the consequences that usually attend it—namely, frivolity and waste of time; when it is used only as in the case you state for the exercise and amusement of an hour among young people (who surely may without any breach of God's ordinance be allowed a little light-heartedness) these consequences cannot follow. Ergo . . . the amusement is at such times perfectly innocent." This was broad of Charlotte, being quite in advance of her father, who frowned on card-playing, and so presumably, on the greater evil of dancing. Emily's attitude, not on record, may be deduced from her general liberality. But, alas, where could they dance, or see dancing, in Haworth?<sup>2</sup>

We have said that Emily's seventeenth year is shadowy and she must be tracked down like a fugitive. But for a brief moment she steps into brilliant unsparing light, and stands there, outlined, with lineaments all clear. Because on November 24, 1834, a Monday, she negligently scribbled a fragment of a diary (kept in conjunction with Anne) between peeling apples for Charlotte and potatoes for Tabby:

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 101. William Cobbett, author of *Rural Rides*, died in 1835.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 123.

"Emily Jane Bronte Anne Bronte," it begins in Emily's tiny print.

"I fed Rainbow, Diamond, Snowflake, Jasper Pheasant (alias).

"This morning Branwell went down to Mr. Driver's and brought news that Sir Robert Peel was going to be invited to stand for Leeds. Anne and I have been peeling apples for Charlotte to make a pudding and for Aunt's. . . .<sup>1</sup> Charlotte said she made puddings perfectly and she . . .<sup>1</sup> of quick but limited intellect. Taby said just now Come Anne pilloputate (i.e. pill a potato) Aunt has come into the kitchen just now and said Where are your feet Anne Anne answered On the floor Aunt. Papa opened the parlour door and gave Branwell a letter saying Here Branwell read this and show it to your Aunt and Charlotte. The Gondals are discovering the interior of Gaaldine. Sally Moseley is washing in the back kitchin.

"It is past twelve o'clock Anne and I have not tidied ourselves, done our bed work, or done our lessons and we want to go out to play We are going to have for dinner Boiled Beef, Turnips, potatoes and apple pudding The kitchin is in a very untidy state Anne and I have not our music exercise which consists of *b major* Taby said on my putting a pen in her face Ya pitter pottering there instead of pilling a potato. I answered O dear, O dear, O dear I will derectly With that I get up, take a knife and begin pilling. Finished pilling the potatoes Papa going to walk Mr. Sunderland expected.

"Anne and I say I wonder what we shall be like and what we shall be and where we shall be, if all goes on well, in the year 1874—in which year I shall be in my 57th year. Anne will be in her 55th year Branwell will be going on his 58th year and Charlotte in her 59th year Hoping we shall all be well at that time We close our paper."

Still in Emily's print (for she was more than amanuensis, she was author conferring with minor associate), the paper is signed "Emily and Anne"; and illustrated by a drawing of a lock of hair—"A bit of Lady Julet's hair done by Anne."

This unpunctuated, misspelled, inconsistently capitalized, haphazard, mutilated document is a treasure trove of implicit information—so much pure gold to be panned.

In the first place it is gathered that "Rainbow, Diamond, Snowflake, Jasper pheasant (alias)," instead of being a pack or flock, was one creature playfully decorated with a garland of fancy names—the clue being in the word "alias." Ellen testified that "during Miss Branwell's reign at the parsonage

<sup>1</sup> Gaps caused by indecipherable words.

the love of animals had to be kept in due subjection. There was but one dog, which was admitted to the parlour at stated times. Emily and Anne always gave him a portion of their breakfast, which was, by their own choice, the old north country diet of oatmeal porridge." <sup>1</sup> Then the elaborately-named was a dog? No: the cognomen, as it were, identifies it as a pheasant.

Also that Emily was somewhat interested in politics.

Also that Emily and Anne were hand maidens to Charlotte, Aunt's understudy; but Emily the subordinate could not resist joking at Charlotte as a perfect pudding-maker.

For Emily was a teaser: she mimicked Tabby's homey Yorkshire speech (but gently for love), poking a pen in her face; and relished the humour of Aunt's "Where are your feet, Anne?" and the balloon-pricking if demure and literal answer, "On the floor Aunt." She was mock-tragic with her "O dear, O dear, O dear, I will directly"; and then indulged in the drollery of anticlimax, by picking up a knife and mildly peeling the horrid vegetable.

We learn, also, from the Diary that the household, at least on one morning, worked with anything but precision; perhaps because it was wash-day and Sally Moseley scrubbing and slopping soap suds in the back kitchen was new to the house.

Also that Emily and Anne sometimes went around *déshabillé*.

Also that Emily made her own bed at least, and still did a few lessons (though not advancing rapidly in spelling or punctuation); at sixteen liked to "play" outdoors; and was regularly studying music. This last would indicate that the upright cottage piano, made by John Green, of London, in mahogany case with satinwood inlay and front panels covered with radiations of pleated brown silk, had already been bought and installed.<sup>2</sup>

The final paragraph of the Diary is intolerably sad in retrospect. "The year 1874 . . . what we shall be and where we shall be, if all goes well . . . I shall be in my 57th year. . . ." Happily at high noon that Monday in November the future (as perhaps the moor) was a fog and impenetrable, and a heart acquainted with grief had not yet lost all its mirth . . . was indeed still curiously naive.

1885 came in cold on top of Haworth hill. It was the year

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 114.

<sup>2</sup> *Museum*.

of Halley's Comet,<sup>1</sup> that mysterious meteor of fiery tail which every seventy-five years sweeps across the stage of the sky like a prima donna. Since it had been predicted well in advance, the Brontë family probably gathered *en masse* on the three or four steps of the bank in front of the door, or in the "garden" itself, craning their necks and peering up into the night. Its coming is a matter of strict calculation, but the beholder is suddenly and inevitably thrilled, as if seeing the supernatural.

It was especially cold in Church. The three girls "used to come in all together," according to a member of the congregation, "and there wor no mooild"—bustle—"about them: they came in so quietly if you hadn't seen them you wouldn't have known they were in at all. They used to come in at t'back door o' t' Church, and they sat in the bothamost pew,"<sup>2</sup> in the chancel, shivering under their cloaks.

Late in January or early in February Charlotte went a second time to The Rydings, Birstall. The postscript to her letter of thanks for the invitation is an example of the sensitive pride practised at the Parsonage: dread of causing trouble or incurring obligations or "wearing out" their welcome: "P.S.—You ask me to stay a month when I come, but as I do not wish to tire you with my company, and as besides Papa and Aunt think a fortnight amply sufficient, I certainly shall not exceed that period." Nor would she accept Ellen's offer to meet her at Bradford: "Papa thinks that . . . such a plan would be productive of too much trouble to you." During her visit she converted Ellen to politics; and when she departed forgot her umbrella.<sup>3</sup> So in March there were at least two new topics of conversation at the Parsonage.

In April Mr. John Buckworth, Mr. Brontë's old vicar, died at Dewsbury.

Then "The Election! The Election!" Charlotte wrote. "That cry has rung even amongst our lonely hills like the blast of a trumpet . . . Ellen, under what banner have your brothers ranged themselves? The Blue or the Yellow? Use your influence with them, entreat them if it be necessary on your knees to stand by their Country and Religion in this day of danger. Oh! I wish the whole West Riding of our

<sup>1</sup> "On Halley's Comet in 1835," a poem by the Rev. Patrick Brontë; and *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

<sup>2</sup> *The Cornhill*, July, 1910.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 125-127.

noble Yorkshire would feel the necessity of exertion. . . .” Zealous Charlotte could have lost no time marshalling her sisters and brother—if they were ever listless. About this time Lord Morpeth, M.P. for West Riding, visited Haworth, and the Brontës, important residents and political enthusiasts, probably turned out to hear his speech.<sup>1</sup>

Charlotte retailed everything to Ellen; also, time after time, sent messages involving Emily. “All the family unite with me in wishes for your welfare.” “Every soul in this house unites with me in best wishes to yourself.” “I.S.—Aunt and my sisters beg their kindest love to you.”

But time was passing. Charlotte was nineteen; Branwell nearly eighteen; Emily nearly seventeen; Anne fifteen. It seemed that something concrete should be done about their futures, if they were to have any; the hour was ripe for decision. Branwell was the most important problem: the rather handsome youth with a mane of dishevelled hair out of politeness called “tawn,” and soft sideburns, delicately humped nose, and weak mouth; Branwell the “genius”; Branwell who was in constant demand at Little Nosey’s Black Bull to entertain guests drinking dog’s-nose with his brilliant talk (“Do you want someone to help you with your bottle, sir? If you do I’ll send for Patrick”);<sup>3</sup> Branwell whom his family expected to be a great artist. The Royal Academy in London offered the best training to artists, so he wrote a letter:

“Sir, Having an earnest desire to enter as probationary student in the Royal Academy, but not being possessed of information as to the means of obtaining my desire, I presume to request from you, as Secretary to the Institution, an answer to the questions—Where am I to present my drawings? At what time? and especially, Can I do it in August or September?”<sup>4</sup>

The boyish Emily could not help but envy Branwell his male future, her own was so unalluring. She was to go to Roe Head as pupil while Charlotte returned as governess. Dark memories of Cowan Bridge floated to the surface of her mind. . . . On July 2 Charlotte wrote Ellen: “Emily and I leave home on the 29th of this month, the idea of being

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 127, 128.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 125–128.

<sup>3</sup> Gaskell, 134. For the landlord’s denial that he ever sent for Branwell, see Chadwick, 114.

<sup>4</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 128.

together consoles us both somewhat. . . .” Could anything or anybody console Emily for quitting the moors that were an extension of herself?

Using three words for every one necessary, Mr. Brontë anxiously addressed Mrs. Franks of Huddersfield:

“My dear Madam,—As two of my dear children are soon to be placed near you, I take the liberty of writing you a few lines in order to request both you and Mr Franks to be so kind as to interpose with your advice and counsel to them in any case of necessity, and, if expedient, to write to Miss Branwell or me if our interference should be requisite. I will charge them strictly to attend to what you advise, though it is not my intention to speak to them of this letter. They both have good abilities, and as far as I can judge their principles are good also, but they are very young, and unacquainted with the ways of this delusive and ensnaring world.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 130.

## XIII

### EMILY AT ROE HEAD

ON July 29 Emily arrived at Roe Head—and the next day turned seventeen.

New places, like new people, never exactly coincide with one's expectation even when previously described. Emily climbed out of a covered cart and stared in surprise. So that was Roe Head! A commodious, cheerful, stone manor-house with two tiers of bulging bow-windows, three stories high, sitting in the midst of a field, guarded by a few bushes of slow-growing English box. The view of green pastureland was lovely; and in the distance lay Kirkstrees, Sir George Armitage's park. That ruin had been a nunnery in the time of the Plantagenets. In the woods was a stone under which Robin Hood was reputed to be buried. The only things impervious to sunlight in that sunny landscape were ancient black yews. Perhaps Charlotte asked Emily how she liked it; and Emily, to cover doubt, said it was all right.<sup>1</sup>

But there was no sense of space; no bareness of prospect satisfying her heart like bareness of truth; no grimness; no refusal to concede; because no prehistoric moor. Plantagenets! To Haworth moor the Plantagenets were upstarts.

Miss Margaret Wooler, the intelligent headmistress, had her surprise too. Though they both wore old-fashioned dresses of a dark rusty green stuff and spoke with a strong Irish accent and bore a family resemblance,<sup>2</sup> this sister Emily was not at all like Charlotte. Charlotte was short and dumpy, and so short-sighted she had to bend over or draw the book almost up to her nose, and seemed always to be seeking something, "moving her head from side to side to catch a sight of it."<sup>3</sup> Emily was tall, with a proud head and a back straight as a dyke. Charlotte, though small, had features disproportionately large; Emily's were better matched, so that Mary Taylor could never have accused her, as she did Charlotte, of being ugly.<sup>3</sup> Her lower lip did

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 95, 96.

<sup>2</sup> Did this family resemblance increase in later years? Richmond who painted Charlotte after Emily's death told William Johnson Cory that when he was getting on well with the portrait, Charlotte, reviewing it from behind him, sobbed and said, "Excuse me—it is so like my sister Emily." (Cory, 187.)

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, 1, 89–100.



not jut like Charlotte's. Like her eyes, her mouth was full—a passionate mouth; people whose natures can be measured and analyzed do not have mouths like that—as the spinster Miss Wooler may have been vaguely but uncomfortably aware.

Emily was shown the bow-windowed schoolroom on the ground floor, with bookshelves on the far side and a long table down the centre covered with a crimson cloth.<sup>1</sup> She was shown the living-room, dining-room and bedroom; and told the hours of study, recitation, and outdoor play; and introduced to her eight or ten schoolmates.

The days passing slowly, Emily learned the ins and outs of Roe Head—but was no happier. Miss Wooler was mystified. The school was not crowded; the pupils came from genteel homes; though Emily had a fine original mind, she had little systematic knowledge and this was an excellent place to acquire some; she was comfortable, warm and fed—then why did she look white and beaten?

No doubt Emily like Charlotte was invited to the Huddersfield home of Mr. and Mrs. Franks with their three children, John, Henry and Elizabeth; and complained like Charlotte that they tried to nurse her.<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Franks had seen Emily, a little crying new baby, shriven with cold baptismal waters. She examined her narrowly now. Why was the girl so sad?

Knowing Emily's love of open air, Charlotte made a point of taking her on all the interesting walks around Roe Head: to the Three Nuns, a quaint old inn with a painted sign, now frequented by mill-hands from worsted factories; to Lady Anne's Well, where the lady—so ran the legend—had been eaten by wolves and the waters on Palm Sunday, turning rainbow colours at six in the morning, had power to heal; to Bloody Lane haunted by one Captain Batt, killed in a duel; to Oakwell Hall, the owner of which still paid a yearly fine because an ancestor had stolen the bell of Birstall Church. In the great hall there hung from an immense pair of stag's horns a printed card recording that on September 1, 1873, fourteen gentlemen slew and ate that very animal, in company with Fairfax Fearnley, Esq., the host. . . . Charlotte was sometimes homesick, herself, for Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor and Martha Taylor ("little Miss Boisterous") were no longer there, and the new tribe seemed somehow less attractive; but walks through

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 89-100.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 98.

gentle meadows in the coloured autumn, meeting mill-hands stained blue from dyeing vats, among picturesque ruins of curious history, cheered her mightily. Especially the extra long rambles on Saturday half-holidays. Sometimes they went as far as the dirty town of Heckmondwike two miles away.<sup>1</sup> They were tired when they pushed the white gate at Roe Head. Why was Emily so morose? Charlotte asked that question but she knew the answer. Years later she wrote beautifully:

"My sister Emily loved the moors. Flowers brighter than the rose bloomed in the blackest of the heath for her; out of a sullen hollow in a living hillside her mind could make an Eden. She found in the bleak solitude many and dear delights; and not the least and best loved was—liberty. Liberty was the breath of Emily's nostrils; without it, she perished. The change from her own home to a school, and from her own very noiseless, very secluded, but unrestricted and unartificial mode of life, to one of disciplined routine (though under the kindest auspices) was what she failed in enduring. Her nature proved here too strong for her fortitude. Every morning when she woke, the vision of home and the moors rushed on her, and darkened and saddened the day that lay before her. Nobody knew what ailed her but me—I knew only too well. In this struggle her health was quickly broken; her white face, attenuated form, and failing strength threatened rapid decline. I felt in my heart she would die, if she did not go home, and with this conviction obtained her recall. She had only been three months at school."<sup>2</sup>

This interpretation has the ring of truth. But Emily's retreat in November does not necessarily indicate lack of fortitude. Fortitude has to do with will-power, of which Emily had a great deal. Perhaps in this instance she did not choose to exercise it. Why exercise it? Exercise it for what? This place was not hers. She would go to her own, and there—if learning was a necessary equipment—from these same books teach herself. But she would have the moors; that would make the whole difference.

Other people of Emily's general type have lived: undemonstrative, giving no outward sign of a passionate attachment to home, but if separated from it, drooping, shrivelling like uprooted plants. But none have more stubbornly refused to take hold on new soil.

Once in Haworth again she carried under her ribs the

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 96-99.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoir of Emily Jane Brontë.*

wild glad heart of an escaped prisoner. Roe Head had not been so bad as Cowan Bridge, but it had been bad enough. In her thankfulness to be home she studied hard, to prove schools superfluous; and did all the ironing and bread-making, to prove herself, after all, an asset to the home.

"Miss Emily," said the sexton's son Billy after her death, "was the strangest of all the family. . . . She never came down into the village, or at least very rarely. Hundreds of times when I was a boy I watched her go through the stile yonder, followed by her dogs. No matter what the weather was, she loved the moors so much that she must go out upon them and enjoy the fresh breezes."<sup>1</sup>

By the time Charlotte had been a pupil at Roe Head three months, the duration of Emily's stay, she had made several fast friends. Emily came home friendless. There were no chattering letters to answer. There were only a few half-sweet memories—perhaps she had visited Ellen five miles away at Birstall, and the Taylors at near-by Gomersal; perhaps, with other pupils, had trembled deliciously before a silk-rustling ghost on the third floor . . . half-sweet memories mingled in her brain with the bitterness of exile.

After Christmas Anne went to Roe Head in Emily's place, leaving Emily and Branwell alone with the old ones. How did Emily get on with Charlotte's crony? She must have looked at Branwell with new interest and concealed pity. Pride had lifted him high—but how great had been the fall thereof. His trip to London, for enrolment in the Royal Academy, had turned into a fleecing in Castle Tavern, kept by Tom Spring the prize-fighter.<sup>2</sup> If he submitted drawings to the Academy they were not accepted. This dream dashed, he dreamed another, that if not a great painter he would become a great writer. But what was he? A village loafer.

The Editor of *Blackwood's*, whom he had again importuned, returned cold silence. Branwell was nonplussed, and irritable. "Sir," he had written, "—Read what I write . . . I commence my letter with the name of James Hogg; for his speeches in your 'Noctes,' when I was a child, laid a hold on my mind. . . . I grieve for his death. . . . He and others like him gave your Magazine the peculiar character which made it famous; as these men die it will decay unless their places be supplied by others like them. Now, sir, to you I appear writing with conceited assurance: but I *am not*; for

<sup>1</sup> *Chambers' Journal*, 1868.

<sup>2</sup> Chadwick, 192.

I know myself so far as to believe in my own originality, and on that ground I desire of you admittance into your ranks. I *know* that I am not one of the wretched writers of the day. I know that I possess strength to assist you beyond some of your own contributors. . . . Now, Sir, do not act like a commonplace person, but like a man willing to examine for himself. Do not turn from the naked truth of my letters, but *prove me*. . . . You have lost an able writer in James Hogg, and God grant you may gain one in Patrick Branwell Brontë." That seemed to Branwell quite splendid. Then what was the matter with the damned editor? he asked in January. But by April he had a suspicion; a hole was come in his iron suit of mail. "Sir, read now at least . . ." he plead in desperation—and enclosed "Misery":

And now the wailing mountains rise  
All dimly mingling with the skies . . .

—which might be worse; but later:

Ha—look on death with smiling eye,  
Ha—content and peaceful die,  
Ha—no, like fire one burning strife  
Convulses each riven string of life,  
And could those lips be moved to say,  
Could those stiff hands be clasped to pray,  
That only voice and prayer would be,  
"Oh save me from that fatal sea  
Where Hell and Death join agony!"

And, as he grew enamoured of disaster, this rhetoric:

Thou has left this site of sin and care,  
Back to thine Ark, while I staid where  
The vilest mass of carnage lay,  
A Raven rushing on the prey  
And Hell's dread night must close my day!

At last repeated ill-success gendered humility. "It would now be impudent in me," he wrote *Blackwood's*, "to speak of my powers, since in five minutes you can tell whether or not they are fudge and nonsense. But this I know, that if they are such, I have no intention of stooping under them. New powers I will get if I can, and provided I keep them, you, sir, shall see them. . . ." <sup>1</sup>

But the Editor of *Blackwood's* had no postage-stamps to waste.

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 133-135.

In losing hope Branwell gained a sister. For he was no longer to be consciously or unconsciously envied. Emily could understand melancholy—had she not bowed beneath it? She could sympathize with failure—had she not to all intents and purposes failed dismally at Roe Head? Miss Wooler had not liked her and had not been sorry to lose her.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Robinson, 76.

## XIV

### YOUNG POETRY

THE year 1836 was for a number of reasons a comparatively happy one for Emily.

Though she missed Anne piercingly, she was free now as never before. Since Charlotte's and Anne's departure she had reigned supreme in the tiny domain of the box-room, undisturbed by another's breathing, and not having to dress and undress in front of alien eyes. If Aunt stirred it was on the other side of the wall.

The box-room contained a chair, some old drawers propped on wood, with brasses, a square work-box, and a bed across the window. The bed may have supported a feather-puff, for it was bilowy as the ocean.<sup>1</sup> What rare delight to sleep in a bed across a window—lie awake in the dark with eyes fastened on gold star-pricks, and wake in the morning almost under the sky! It was the next thing to sleeping on the moor. For the sky was a wonderful companion—it was never the same.

Escaped from the *espionage* of curious eyes, Emily began writing poetry. Her first extant verse is dated July 1836. Since the prosody is competently handled and the phrasing not infelicitous, it may be assumed that this poem was preceded by others. Art has its groping childhood; it does not spring full grown and helmeted, like Minerva, from the head of the artist. If, then, she was writing poetry in the spring of 1836, or earlier, should we grieve that there exists to-day no record of her apprenticeship? No. Scarcely any poet's first scratchings are brilliant, however much they relieve and edify the poet. So perhaps it is well Emily struck a match and the blue grasping flame spurted; or tore sheets of paper to black and white confetti.

Did she write letters to absent Anne, and Anne reply? It seems a safe speculation that having been inseparable since childhood, they corresponded regularly; and that when separated, as when together, divulged to each other, if not all of their secret thoughts, many of them. But, alas, that devoted and precious correspondence was destroyed by Emily or Anne as too intimate for strange eyes; or later by Charlotte.

Emily and Charlotte probably corresponded too, though

<sup>1</sup> Emily's pen-and-ink sketch with the 1845 Diary.

more superficially—Emily exposed herself only to Anne, her bedroom, and the barren heath. Besides, Charlotte was pouring out her emotion upon Ellen so freely, there was scarcely a drop left over for a less than bottom sister. For Charlotte had religious hysterics that spring; it affected her health. "But Ellen," she wrote in May, vehemence burning away commas and periods, "I know the treasures of the Bible I love and adore them I can *see* the Well of Life in all its clearness and brightness; but when I stoop down to drink of the pure waters they fly from my lips as if I were Tantalus. . . ." Week by week her piety grew more hectic and Calvinistic: "I have stings of conscience—visitings of remorse—glimpses of Holy, inexpressible things. . . ." "I would submit," she cried pathetically, "to be old, grey-haired, to have passed all my youthful days of enjoyment and be tottering on the verge of the grave, if I could only thereby ensure the prospect of reconciliation to God and Redemption through His Son's merits. . . . You have cheered me, my darling . . . my sister in the spirit. . . ." Indeed by July she was so impressed by the superiority of spiritual over blood kin, her protestations reached a pitch: "Ellen I wish I could live with you always, I begin to cling to you more fondly than ever I did. If we had but a cottage and competency of our own I do think we might live and love on till Death without being dependent on any third person for happiness." Which definitely omitted Emily.<sup>1</sup>

But Emily was not cast down by this or anything else that summer. She had no time for the luxury of despondency and overwrought self-abasement. Nor was she exercised about the condition of her soul. No: she was lying awake looking at the stars. She was rising from bed to half-print, half-write, in minute characters:

Cold, clear, and blue the morning heaven  
 Expands its arch on high;  
 Cold, clear, and blue Lake Werna's water  
 Reflects that winter's sky:  
 The moon has set, but Venus shines  
 A silent, silvery star.<sup>1</sup>

Not an extraordinary, but a decent little poem. She was mystified by the process by which it had come out of her; knowing only that she derived pleasure from choosing those

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 139, 140, 146.

particular words out of millions of possible words. Lake Werna, that was Gondal. After playing the Gondal game many years, Gondal and Haworth names were all mixed up; were interchangeable. But Venus shines. . . . While the rest of the family slept, how often she had watched the brightness of that single star.

The little Venus poem gave her so much secret joy, she tried another:

Will the day be bright or cloudy?  
Sweetly has its dawn begun;  
But the heaven may shake with thunder  
Ere the setting of the sun.

Somehow that pleased her less than the Venus poem. Why? Because an imagined exigency of rhythm had compelled her to say "the heaven" when she meant just "heaven"? She gave the poem another stanza:

Lady, watch Apollo's journey;  
Thus thy first hour's course shall be:  
If his beams through summer vapours  
Warm the earth all placidly,—  
Her days shall pass like a pleasant dream  
in sweet tranquillity.<sup>1</sup>

That was poor. She had been pushed—by what?—into saying things she did not really feel. The stanza was made up, artificial, dishonest—and she so hated dishonesty. But the long, falling, rather graceful movement of the last line intrigued her. She concocted two more stanzas, just as sterile but with long, languid last lines: "Her days shall pass like a mournful story in care and tears and pain"; and, "Her days shall pass in Glory's light the world's drear desert through." But she had no sense of triumph.

No, this business of poetry which appeared easy was not easy after all. But it was worth working at. For the right word when she found it satisfied her on a deep level of her being.

One day this July she wrote in exasperation under a failure of a poem: "I am more terrifically and idiotically and brutally STUPID—than ever I was in the whole course of my incarnate existence. The above precious lines are the fruits of one hour's most agonizing labour between  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 6 and  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 7 in the evening of July—1836."

<sup>1</sup> July 12, 1836.



This was healthy. She knew what she wanted to do if she could not always do it. When she describes, simply, what profoundly touches her, when she refuses to be influenced by the falsely romantic spirit which in the early nineteenth century contended with the true spirit, when she is unliterary—she succeeds. She could afford to rely on her emotions: like her instincts, her sensibilities, they were sound. Even when the verse fails it often gives evidence of latent power:

The inspiring music's thrilling sound,  
The glory of the festal day,  
The glittering splendour rising round,  
Have passed, like all earth's joys, away.<sup>1</sup>

This is Gondal, obvious, fictitious and artificial; it is over-said; not subtle; lamentably young. But the sudden turn from glory and glitter to those always-melancholy words "have passed," and the suspension (by means of the generalization "like all earth's joys") which intensifies that final word "away," are technically excellent. They prove her a poet in the making.

The evening sun was sinking down  
On low green hills and clustered trees;  
It was a scene as fair and lone  
As ever felt the soothing breeze  
That cools the grass when day is gone . . .<sup>1</sup>

does not quite come off. The picture blurs, it has no edge. But the faults are negative rather than positive: taste is not offended. Indeed a genuine though pale beauty suffuses the faintly limned landscape. "It was a scene as fair and lone. . . ." These simple words seize on a quality of place.

High waving heather, 'neath stormy blasts bending,  
Midnight and moonlight and bright shining stars;  
Darkness and glory rejoicingly blending,  
Earth rising to heaven and heaven descending . . .<sup>2</sup>

Ah, this is the moor and Emily in a wilder, more characteristic mood. She is experimenting with different rhythms and with feminine endings. Again the writing is young. But the phrasing is bolder and, in a large loose sort of way, effective. "Darkness and glory." She had not committed

<sup>1</sup> About September 23, 1836.

<sup>2</sup> December 13, 1836.

herself to these two yet, but already her mind linked them. "Earth rising to heaven and heaven descending" is a fine description of the moor's unreclaimed waste.

Emily was eighteen and at home. She had hours and hours of the day and night for thinking and dreaming; she could run to the moor whenever she took a notion. Therefore in spite of the tragedy of her mother's and sisters' deaths (for her memories had not changed); in spite of a black sediment sunk to the bottom of her mind (for her temperament had not changed nor her grievances been forgotten)—she was more happy than sad in 1836. She was developing. As time wore on she was able more nearly to approximate on paper what she experienced inwardly. We know what we are. She knew that her verses were not without merit. And she must have felt within the fastness of her soul that if she could become a first-class poet, it would compensate for much, perhaps for everything. So she dramatized her situation:

Tell me, tell me smiling child,  
What the past is like to thee?  
'An Autumn evening, soft and mild,  
With a wind that sighs mournfully.'

Tell me what is the present hour?  
'A green and flowery spray,  
Where a young bird sits gathering its power  
To mount and fly away.'

And what is the future, happy one?  
'A sea beneath a cloudless sun,—  
A mighty glorious, dazzling sea,  
Stretching into infinity.'<sup>1</sup>

Most young ladies without something new in prospect grumble. Not Emily. Cowan Bridge was past; Roe Head past. She wished for no change in life, except the perfecting of her abilities as a writer, to express what otherwise would be mute as the dead. "And what is the future, happy one?" She envisaged it as what she preferred: an extension of the present; hung on to it as a dreamer fights to hold the fading images and the purport of the images of a dream. She had achieved a small private happiness by private means, painfully, after many adjustments. Precariously won, it was jealously prized. She took it out on the moors for company; and hoarded and locked it in her room for

<sup>1</sup> September 23, 1836.

safe keeping. But Papa, Aunt and Branwell must have caught glimpses of it and wondered. Emily was a strange girl; not like any of the others. What was she up to now? Why these secret movements, this secret smile? 'The reason could not be important for she never went anywhere, nor saw anyone.

She did not require to go on her human legs nor see with human eyes, like superficial people who imagine they have exhausted a pasture and chafe to move forward. She nibbled on the most out-of-the-way roots and they were sweet. She munched rich clover in fields abandoned by the literal and hasty.



Emily Brontë's water-colour drawing of her dog "Keeper", April 1837.

*(Haworth Parsonage Museum )*



## XV

### SPECTRAL TREES

THE happiness did not last. Even before 1836 was quite out things started to go wrong.

Just after Charlotte and Anne had returned from Roe Head for Christmas holidays, faithful old Tabby sallied forth on an errand one night and while descending the steep ice-coated hill slipped and fell. It was dark; she might have lain there till morning. But the ears of a passer-by caught her feeble groans, and she was carried into the druggist's shop, and discovered to have dislocated and shattered the bones of her leg. All night she suffered agony, since a surgeon could not be procured till six o'clock; and fell into what Charlotte called a "very doubtful and dangerous state." Charlotte and Emily and Anne, who must now turn in and do all the housework, loved Tabby as one of the family and suffered to see her suffer. Especially Emily. More than her sisters she had profited by Tabby's rough moorland philosophy, and esteemed the old woman's quaint blunt ways. Charlotte was gloomy because Ellen's expected visit had to be cancelled. The moors were so blockaded with snow they could not get out. Altogether it was a dismal Christmas: much running up and down stairs with trays, changing of bandages, anxious questions, and sense of frustration.<sup>1</sup>

Miss Branwell and Mr. Brontë said that Tabby must use up her savings before they could give financial aid, and stay with her sister in the village, at this time of trouble; but the three girls refused to eat till it was agreed that Tabby should stay on at the Parsonage and be nursed by themselves, not touching a penny of her own money.<sup>2</sup>

Then, while the whole family was home and available for discussion, Mr. Brontë said or implied that the girls must do what they could to relieve him of the burden of covering so many backs and filling so many mouths. Not that he did this unkindly: indeed he was much more indulgent now than formerly, time having softened him; but £200 a year was meagre and he was thrifty<sup>3</sup>—the girls had never had so much as a penny a week allowance.<sup>4</sup> What could they

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 149, 150.

<sup>2</sup> This story was told by Elizabeth Hardaker (known as Betty), the village druggist. (Gaskell, 164.) Mrs. Gaskell puts the whole episode of the breaking of the leg at Christmas, 1837, which is a year too late.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 61, 186.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 143.

do? They were fitted for nothing but teaching, and not well fitted for that. Emily shuddered invisibly, as if a door had been opened and a cold draught were sweeping in. If being a pupil was incarceration, being a governess was vile slavery. Yet how could she make special demands upon her father? How ask for special privileges? She was compassionate for him and proud for herself.

During this month of December she wrote a quatrain—the saddest verse she had composed, and the best:

Woods ye need not frown on me;  
Spectral trees, that so dolefully  
Shake your heads in the dreary sky,  
Ye need not mock so bitterly.<sup>1</sup>

What were those spectral trees but threats of the future?—the probability that soon she would be compelled to go among strangers in a menial capacity?

The friendship between Charlotte and Branwell was on the wane, and that fact in itself, together with the evil star beginning to rise and shine over his head, strongly recommended him to Emily. It was not a sudden realignment: it had been gradual, and was inevitable. Perhaps Charlotte had already got wind that her brother as cock-of-the-walk of Haworth was not a moral paragon, and was shocked. If Emily got wind of it, she did not judge—or did not care. At any rate Charlotte left off playing the Angrian game with her brother; and Emily, intrigued by the streak of originality, if not genius, in his mediocrity, drew closer—like being attracted by like. Qualities and dangers in other people are instinctively apprehended by the sensitive. Perhaps Emily knew by non-rational means that Branwell, like herself, was just a little mad, and so capable of dark extravagances: of pulling the whole house down around his ears.

Poor Branwell. In January he indited another epistle to the insensible Editor of *Blackwood's*: “In a former letter I hinted that I was in possession of something, the design of which, whatever might be its execution, would be superior to that of any series of articles which has yet appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine*”—and offered to deliver it by hand, three hundred miles away, if the Editor would grant him an interview. . . . “Will you still so wearisomely refuse me a word when you can neither know

<sup>1</sup> December 13, 1836.

what you refuse nor whom you are refusing?" Not satisfied he pursued the lovely idea: "Do you think your magazine so perfect that no addition to its power would be either possible or desirable? Is it pride which actuates you—or custom—or prejudice? Be a man, sir! and think no more of these things."<sup>1</sup> The Editor thought no more of Mr. P. B. Brontë.

So Branwell bearded William Wordsworth, sixty-seven years old and weighted with honours. "Sir," he wrote, "I most earnestly entreat you to read and pass your judgment on what I have sent you, because from the day of my birth to this the nineteenth year of my life I have lived among secluded hills, where I could neither know what I was or what I could do. I read for the same reason that I ate or drank, because it was a real craving of nature. . . ." This, surely, was true, not only of himself but his sisters; and curiously touching. But Branwell did not know when to stop. "My aim, sir," he elaborated, "is to push out into the open world, and for this I trust not poetry alone; that might launch the vessel, but could not bear her on. Sensible and scientific prose, bold and vigorous efforts"—this letter an example!—"in my walk in life, would give a further title to the notice of the world; and then again poetry ought to brighten and crown that name with glory. . . . Surely in this day, when there is not a *writing* poet worth a sixpence, the field must be open, if a better man can step forward. . . ." Mr. Wordsworth, valued at sixpence, was silent. According to Southey, the letter made him "disgusted, for it contained gross flattery and plenty of abuse for other poets." It contained something else too: a premonition, a prophecy: "What I send you is the Prefatory Scene," wrote Branwell, "of a much longer subject, in which I have striven to develop strong passions and weak principles struggling with a high imagination and acute feelings, till, as youth hardens toward age, evil deeds and short enjoyments end in mental misery and bodily ruin."<sup>2</sup>

Branwell could not continue to conceal anything which agitated him; he liked to talk too well. Then Emily, representing youth, was his natural ally against Papa and Aunt, representing age. Since Charlotte and Anne had returned to Roe Head, he must confide in Emily or no

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 150, 151.

<sup>2</sup> Twentieth, actually.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 151, 152, 156.



one. It is therefore unlikely that Emily remained ignorant of the daring letter to Wordsworth, though she probably did not actually see it. Had she seen it, she must have audibly disapproved, and there is no evidence that, convinced of her good judgment, he modified the phrasing, or, unconvinced, was angry at her presumption. So let us suppose she too breathed quickly till time for the postman. In March Charlotte bragged that Southey had answered her letter, and very kindly, even though he ventured the opinion that "literature cannot be the business of a woman's life and it ought not to be." What bitterness to Branwell. Southey's letter, in the absence of one from Wordsworth, must have seemed to Charlotte's old companion the climax of her infidelity; while to Emily the whole thing but another proof of the cringing submission of most minds. Never in a thousand years could she have angled, however self-respectingly, for Wordsworth's or Southey's or anyone else's praise.

As long as the suggestion that Emily become a governess was general, it could not greatly harm; but as soon as specific, took on a terrible reality. Who first mentioned Miss Patchett's school at Law Hill, Southowram, near Bradford? Cousin Morgan of Bradford? Who wrote Miss Patchett, recommending Miss Emily Brontë? When? Did Emily apply, stating her qualifications? Did negotiations drag on, or were they speedily concluded? When was she engaged for the autumn of 1837? Why the delay? Because the teacher whose place she was to take did not drop out till autumn?

The whole problem may have become immediate and menacing as early as February, because in February anger was added to Emily's grief:

Redbreast, early in the morning,  
Dark and cold and cloudy grey,  
Wildly tender is thy music,  
Chasing angry thought away.

My heart is not enraptured now,  
My eyes are full of tears,  
And constant sorrow on my brow  
Has done the work of years.

Of course the new sorrow recalled old ones; she remembered that, underneath, she had always been sad; her hope of escaping strangers was "quenched." But that seemed

only a partial explanation of her despair. What woke it? she asked, searching for a more penetrating cause; and answered in a parable:

What woke it then? A little child  
Strayed from its father's cottage door,  
And in the hour of moonlight wild  
Lay lonely on the desert moor.

I heard it then you heard it too,  
And seraph-sweet it sang to you;  
But like the shriek of misery  
That wild, wild music wailed to me! <sup>1</sup>

Like a metaphor, an allegory can be mixed. This is a mixed allegory. Yet not all of its elements are obscure. The "child" in "Tell me, tell me, smiling child" was herself, and now this child is lost. Others think its fate good: she knows its crying is that of the damned. Incidentally, as if for compensation, she is a better poet unhappy than happy.

To make life more difficult, she was now physically mature, and so feeling new and mysterious emotions.

Charlotte, similarly scourged, had by way of sublimation suffered a religious orgy amounting to sickness. She wanted something dreadfully but did not know what (a common predicament of young men and women); so figured that it must be God, and then that it must be Ellen. When in February Ellen wrote from Brookroyd (whence she had removed from Birstall) to announce a trip to Bath, Charlotte answered dramatically: "Why are we to be divided? Ellen, it must be because we are in danger of loving each other too well—of losing sight of the Creator in idolatry of the *creature*"—and offered to walk the four miles to Brookroyd.<sup>2</sup>

But Emily had no delusions about God, or a friend. Walking on the moors wind-blown and free and writing scraps of verse of unequal merit were her only outlets that spring and early summer; these and letters, her only diversions, while the household kept to the even tenor of its ways. Charlotte wrote that Miss Wooler's school was transferring to Heald House, Dewsbury; and that she was reading Sims' *Brief Memorial of Oberlin* and Richmond's *Domestic Portraiture*; and that she occasionally saw Mary and Martha Taylor. Emily got a faint vicarious pleasure out of these details; but at best, for a soul to feed on, they

<sup>1</sup> February, 1837.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 153.

were shards. Especially a soul with an appetite for strong meat and heady drink. Emily was starved: being one of those people so delicately balanced that, if one thing is wrong, all is wrong. As the plans for her going to Law Hill developed, all seemed wrong. And her trouble increased because with stoic resolve she concealed what she felt; covered with a quiet front a maelstrom of seething emotions, all of which she may have blamed on circumstances, but some of which were the result of temperament and physical ripening.

On March 6 she wrote a Gondal Poem which was yet not Gondal, being herself:

There shines the moon, at noon of night,  
Vision of Glory, Dream of light!  
Holy as heaven, undimmed and pure,  
Looking down on the lonely moor—  
And lonelier still beneath her ray  
That drear moon stretches far away  
Till it seems strange that ought can lie  
Beyond its zone of silver sky.

Bright moon—dear moon! when years have past  
My weary feet return at last,  
And still upon Lake Elmor's breast  
Thy solemn rays serenely rest  
And still the Firn-leaves sighing wave  
Like mourners over Elbé's grave  
And Earth's the same but Oh to see  
How wildly Time has altered me!

From this point the poem takes a confused course; till a dying man cries for his native home as Emily in anticipation was already crying for hers:

"Oh once again  
Might I my native country see!  
But once again—one single day!  
And must it—can it *never* be?  
To die and die so far away  
When life has hardly smiled for me.

For you'll forget the lonely grave  
And mouldering corpse by Elmor's wave."

Now poetry is beginning to take possession of her, instead of her being in possession of poetry. The emotion presses up, up. This is hard to bear when one lives in a world all by one's self.

She was not open to personal influence, partly because there was so little common ground between herself and the people around her. She had met no one with greater potentialities. This does not mean she was conceited. She was anything but conceited. She did not think of herself as better, but only as different. The echo of public opinion did not reach her remote habitation. If she felt something was right, it was right for her; if fitting, for her it was so. The arbiter was within her breast, and with its decisions no one was permitted to interfere. Outsiders were ignored. If visitors were being entertained in the parlour and she wanted a book, in she darted with averted face, and out again with not so much as "How do you do?"<sup>1</sup>

Her dog Keeper, half bulldog, half mastiff, was her closest friend now. She shared her breakfast of porridge with him, and suffered him to mount her lap; and sometimes showed him off in the sitting-room by making him roar like a lion and jump frantically.<sup>2</sup> The thought of separation from him hurt her as much as if he were a human being. In April she painted him in water-colour<sup>3</sup> with forepaws under his muzzle, nose buried in grass, ears drooped, tawny ripples at his shoulders, and the white of his small eye gleaming—so she could take the picture with her when the fatal hour came round. On the portrait she wrote "Keeper from life." Wishing to confer on him the absolute freedom she craved for herself, she had left off his metal collar inscribed "The Rev. P. Brontë, Haworth."<sup>3</sup>

In June during a night of storm, Emily had a bad dream, and when morning sunshine flooded the world, was glad to get up and

Chase the visions from my head,  
Whose forms have troubled me

by trying to record the whole experience in a poem:

In all the hours of gloom  
My soul was wrapped away;  
I dreamt I stood by a marble tomb  
Where royal corpses lay.

It was just the time of eve,  
When parted ghosts might come  
Above their prisoned dust to grieve,  
And wail their woeful doom.

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 274.      <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 274, 275.

<sup>3</sup> Museum.

And truly at my side  
 I saw a shadowy thing,  
 Most dim; and yet its presence there  
 Curdled my blood with ghastly fear,  
 And ghastlier wondering.

And still it bent above,  
 Its features still in view;  
 It seemed close by, and yet more far  
 Than this world from the farthest star  
 That tracks the boundless blue.

Indeed 'twas not the space  
 Of earth or time between,  
 But the sea of deep eternity,  
 The gulf o'er which mortality  
 Has never, never been.

Oh, bring not back again  
 The horror of that hour!  
 When its lips opened, and a sound  
 Awoke the stillness reigning round. . .<sup>1</sup>

This verse, as verse, is for the most part poor. But as the revelation of a melodramatic dream it is not ineffective, and bears the hall-marks of an actual and not made-up experience: the bodying-forth of her apprehensions about Law Hill, metamorphosed of course, as fears are always metamorphosed in dreams.

About the same time she wrote a lament for what was going to happen, with but a weak Gondal disguise of names. Julius was King of Gondaland, of which the capital was Regina, and Emily had long since acquired the habit of blending imagined Gondal events with Haworth facts—thus securing the leeway of myth without relinquishing the poignancy of truth. The people of Regina were losing, or about to lose, their freedom:

Woe for the day! Regina's pride,  
 Regina's hope is in the grave;  
 And who shall rule my land beside,  
 And who shall save?

Woe for the day! With gory tears  
 My country's sons this day shall rue.  
 Woe for the day! A thousand years  
 Cannot repair what one shall do.

Woe for the day! 'Twixt rain and wind  
 That sad lament was ringing:  
 It almost broke my heart to hear  
 Such dreary, dreary singing.

<sup>1</sup> June 10, 1837.

She was the people of Regina, and she was herself, observing Regina. Naturally. The sufferer and the observer of suffering are in us all. They love each other, those two manifestations of one soul, but cannot go to each other's aid. The first remains over-sensitive and the second, though often sympathetic, inert.

On June 20 King William IV died at Windsor, and the next day the *Leeds Intelligencer* and the *Leeds Mercury* told in graphic detail how at five o'clock that morning the Archbishop and the Lord Chamberlain had ordered a carriage and pressed from Windsor to Kensington; where, in the grey dawn, they had fallen on their knees before eighteen-year-old sleepy-eyed Victoria, who was in her dressing-gown, proclaiming her queen of England. One sees Emily and Branwell bent over the paper; the dark head and the red. The even was romantic enough for confirmed romancers; its political consequences far-reaching enough for vehement (though amateur) politicians. It made an excited interlude in the midst of Emily's monotonous and sad expectation of departure. When Charlotte and Anne came home for a brief summer vacation the wonder was again discussed. For so long England had had a king—how strange to have a queen! Rumour said she was quite devout. The Archbishop had kissed her hand. What style was the gown she wore? Do you think her pretty, Emily? No. I do: so mild-looking and sweet. Victoria was committed to the Whigs. What a shame. Why should an anointed queen side with Whigs?

In July and August Emily yielded a crop of poems, fruit of an inner crisis. As the hour of her exile approached she waxed more melancholy: all nine of these poems are about decline of hope, and doom, and more, and more oppressive, nightmares. It seemed to her that everything about Haworth, now that she was about to lose it, was pleasant:

Sleep not, dream not; this bright day  
Will not, cannot last for aye;  
Bliss like thine is bought by years  
Dark with torment and with tears.<sup>1</sup>

Nor was her sorrow unmixed with self-pity, that underminer and destroyer. The feminine and sedate clothes of a lady-teacher were being prepared for her journey—but it

<sup>1</sup> July 26, 1837.

was the young, carefree, terse boy in her whom she loved, whom she could not take along—she did not love the lady-teacher, that fraud. She would have to say good-bye to the innocency of childhood:

I love thee, boy; for all divine,  
All full of God thy features shine.  
Darling enthusiast, holy child,  
Too good for this world's warring wild;  
Too heavenly now, but doomed to be  
Hell-like, in heart and misery.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, she had put on a shell of hardness before, when pitched among strangers—to hide suffering—and she knew she would put it on again. The free flow of spiritual sap within her spiritual veins would be stopped up. It seemed a law that what one wanted and needed most, here on earth, one *ipse causa* did not get.

An what shall change that angel-brow,  
And quench that spirit's glorious glow?  
Relentless laws that disallow  
True virtue and true joy below.<sup>1</sup>

She felt an extremity of pessimism.

And blame me not, if, when the dread  
Of suffering clouds thy youthful head,  
If, when by crime and sorrow tossed  
Thy wandering bark is wrecked and lost,  
I too depart, I too decline,  
And make thy path no longer mine.  
'Tis thus that human minds will turn:  
All doomed alike to sin and mourn:  
Yet all with long gaze fixed afar,  
Adoring virtue's distant star.<sup>1</sup>

The crime and sorrow and sin here invoked were allegorical; the language of the Old Testament which she heard every night at family worship and every Sunday in Church, brought home; the hypothetical opposites (or so it seemed in a melodramatic mood) of the innocence she relinquished on becoming a hypocritical lady-teacher.

This theme is developed still more clearly in a poem of twelve stanzas, from which I quote:

I saw thee, child, one summer day  
Suddenly leave thy cheerful play,  
And in the green grass, lowly lying,  
I listened to thy mournful sighing.

<sup>1</sup> July 26, 1837.

I knew the wish that waked that wail;  
 I knew the source whence sprung those tears:  
 You longed for fate to raise the veil  
 That darkened over coming years.

. . . . .  
 Those tiny hands in vain essay  
 To brush the shadowy fiend away. . .

. . . . .  
 Cut off from hope on early day,  
 From power and glory cut away.<sup>1</sup>

Instinctively she went to the moors for comfort, and lay on the heather and looked up into the sky and thought of her fate. To leave these moors! Southowram was situated among moors as bleak as these, they said, or bleaker—they said that to cheer her—but it was these particular moors she loved, this curve and this hollow. No duplicates would suffice; she wanted the identical. Perhaps the following poem formed in her mind as she lay bedded on purple bloom:

Alone I sat; the summer day  
 Had died in smiling light away;  
 I saw it die, I watched it fade  
 From misty hill and breezeless glade.

. . . . .  
 I asked myself: "Oh, why has Heaven  
 Denied the precious gift to me,  
 The glorious gift to many given  
 To speak their thoughts in poetry?"

"Dreams have encircled me," I said,  
 "From careless childhood's sunny time;  
 Visions by ardent fancy fed  
 Since life was in its morning prime."

But now, when I had hoped to sing,  
 My fingers touch a tuneless string  
 And still the burden of the strain  
 Is: "Strive no more; 'tis all in vain."<sup>2</sup>

A shorter poem has virtually the same content, though in a more Gondalian and symbolic form. The imagery is adequate and the mood flawlessly sustained:

The battle had passed from the height,  
 And still did evening fall;  
 While heaven with its lustral light  
 Gloriously canopied all.

<sup>1</sup> July, 1837.

<sup>2</sup> August, 1837.



The dead around were sleeping  
 On heath and granite grey;  
 And the dying their last watch were keeping  
 In the closing of the day.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed there are three more poems (one a fragment) which might have been written the same day as the two foregoing. The peace of that afternoon and the significant darkness of that evening sank deep into her soul; and became to her disordered mind emblems of her past and future:

How golden-bright from earth and heaven  
 The summer day declines!  
 How gloriously o'er land and sea  
 The parting sunbeam shines!

There is a voice in the wind that waves  
 Those bright-rejoicing trees. . .<sup>1</sup>

"Those bright-rejoicing trees." No matter how often she had lapsed into the second-rate, and would in future lapse, such imagery is perfect.

A fainter attenuation of the same quality is in the last two stanzas of another poem:

And all as pure, and all as bright  
 The sun of evening died;  
 And purer still its parting light  
 Shone on Lake Elmor's tide.

Waveless and calm lies that silent deep  
 In its wilderness of moors;  
 Solemn and soft the moonbeams sleep  
 Upon its heathy shores.<sup>1</sup>

So intensely did she love the moor, she had only to touch it and the small cramped black writing on white paper was poetry:

The sun has set, and the long grass now  
 Waves dreamily in the evening wind;  
 And the wild bird has flown from that  
 old grey stone. . .<sup>1</sup>

And,

In all the lonely landscape round  
 I see no light and hear no sound,  
 Except the wind that far away  
 Comes sighing o'er the heathy sea.<sup>1</sup>

How much more simple and authentic than a quatrain about a demented Gondalian lady whose face was seen "once perchance" in a palace corridor.

<sup>1</sup> August, 1837.

But now the day of departure was almost at hand. Emily could not recant; she was committed. Miss Elizabeth Patchett had outlined her work; a meagre salary been agreed upon. Her clothes were mended and washed and ironed and packed. She was to take, in all probability, the Bradford coach, which was cheaper than hiring for individual use the Haworth covered cart or gig.

And then Emily had another nightmare:

O God of Heaven! The dream of horror,  
The frightful dream is over now;  
The sickened heart, the blasting sorrow,  
The ghastly night the ghastlier morrow,  
The aching sense of utter woe;

but when she tried to describe it further, the bad dream by night became confused with the bad dream by day; illustrating the same sorrowful point: an extremity of pain. She was learning pain's anatomy and physiology: the tears "that burst from out their dreary dwelling," the "tossing," the "grinding teeth," the "impatient rage," the "useless shrinking from thoughts which yet could not be borne." She was learning—at what cost—that extremity of pain is peace: as a whirlpool at its central core is still and calm. Thus for an instant she had a desperate sweet absurd illusion that this respite was more than temporary, and her heart welled with gratitude:

Bless thee, bright sea and glorious dome,  
And my own world, my spirit's home;  
Bless thee, bless all—I cannot speak:  
My voice is choked, but not with grief;  
And salt drops from my haggard cheek  
Descend, like rain upon the heath.

Then she remembered reality:

I used to weep, even in my sleep:  
The night was dreadful, like the day.

And at the same time the griefs of adolescence:

I used to weep when winter's snow  
Whirled through the grating stormily;  
But then it was a calmer woe  
For everything was dear to me.

The bitterest time, the worst of all,  
Was that in which the summer sheen  
Cast a green lustre on the wall  
That told of fields of lovelier green.

And the fits of temper which she had not yet learned to control:

I flung myself upon the stone;  
I howled, and tore my tangled hair;  
And then, when the first gust had flown,  
Lay in unspeakable despair.

"But this is past," she says, realizing the unwisdom of augmenting present trouble with a recollection of troubles past and irrevocable. She must, if she can, "shake off the fetters" and "live and love and smile again."

The waste of youth, the waste of years,  
Departed in that dungeon thrall;  
The gnawing grief, the hopeless tears:  
Forget them, oh, forget them all!<sup>1</sup>

Only one other poem was written before she quit Haworth on the mirthless adventure, "Song," which is almost pure Gondalian. This time grief is not present but anticipated; and does not belong to her (Lord of Elbë) but to a friend left behind in Gondal (Anne, or a composite of the family):

Lord of Elbë, on Elbë Hill,  
The mist is thick and the wind is chill,  
And the heart of thy friend from the dawning of day  
Has sighed for sorrow that thou wert away.

"Bright are the fires in thy noble home," sighs this imaginary admirer. . . .

But thou art now on the desolate sea,  
Thinking of Gondal and grieving for me;  
Longing to be in sweet Elbë again;  
Thinking and grieving and longing in vain.<sup>2</sup>

Could any disguise be thinner? To be grieved for is balm to the grieving.

On August 24 Charlotte in Dewsbury, writing to Ellen in Bath, observed that Patty (Martha Taylor) had ridden over on her pony to say that she and ailing Mary were going on a tour in Wales; then, on October 2, that Martha and Mary had returned from their tour—adding this surprising intelligence:

1 "My sister Emily has gone into a situation as teacher in a large school of near forty pupils, near Halifax. I have had

<sup>1</sup> August 7, 1837.

<sup>2</sup> August 19, 1837. This poem is signed by A. G. A., for A. G. Alaisda, a character in the Gondal cycle,

one letter from her since her departure; it gives an appalling account of her duties—hard labour from six in the morning until near eleven at night, with only one half-hour of exercise between. This is slavery. I fear she will never stand it”—and after some random remarks, appends (with Emily’s character in mind?): “Ellen, depend upon it, all people have their dark side.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus, though there exists no other reference to Emily’s sad faring forth, its approximate date is fixed between August 24 and October 2, 1837. Or, more definitely, between September 1 and September 30. If earlier than September 1, Charlotte would have mentioned it, as being at least as important as the Taylors’ Welsh sortie, in her letter of August 24. If later than September 30, Emily would not have had time to arrive, get settled and compose a letter to Charlotte, and the letter to reach Haworth, before October 2. We will suppose, then, that Emily, alone, with her heart in her mouth, climbed the steps of the Bradford–Halifax coach at its stop between Keighley and Haworth toward the end of September: a tall girl, unbecomingly dressed, with fine eyes subtly distended as if seeing spectres.

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 162.

## XVI

### EMILY VS. SHIRLEY

EMILY went in at the high uncompromising door of Miss Patchett's School for Young Ladies. When she emerged a new and radical experience had burned a mark on her as ineffaceable as a tattoo.

This seems a good time therefore to re-examine Emily up to this point; especially in reference to Charlotte's book *Shirley*, written years later.

How far can Shirley Keeldar be taken for Charlotte's conception of Emily's character; and how far can Charlotte's conception be taken for the truth?

Even if Charlotte had not told Mrs. Gaskell that Shirley was Emily,<sup>1</sup> we would be justified in assuming this by the striking similarity between certain of Shirley's traits and certain of Emily's, well authenticated; and by the general fact that Charlotte, with a tremendous talent for observing and remembering and analyzing character, was not inventive. Her novels are brilliantly synthetic rather than creative. Nevertheless she herself wrote Eilen: "You are not to suppose any of the characters in *Shirley* intended as literal portraits. It would not suit the rules of art, nor my own feelings, to write in that style. We only suffer reality to *suggest*, never to *dictate*. The heroines are abstractions. . . . Qualities I have seen, loved and admired, are here and there put in as decorative gems"—this, in defence, when Ellen did not recognise Emily.<sup>2</sup>

How, then, can the real references to Emily be separated from ideal references? We must proceed with great caution.

Charlotte was limited in her understanding of Emily in the sense that we never truly understand a character foreign to our own, just as we never truly understand actions of which, under no circumstances, would we be capable. In many respects Charlotte and Emily were profoundly dissimilar. As the years multiplied, Charlotte's sympathy for Emily increased, but was never, while they both lived, perfect. She had a desire to change Emily; to expurgate and edit her; to reduce her size and smoothe her roughnesses; to make her over into her own image. Why? With the very best of intentions: for Emily's good; because she,

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 414; *Life and Letters*, IV, 87.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 37.

Charlotte, loved her (the motive for many evil deeds). What part of her efforts were not unconscious, were conscientious. So she cannot be blamed—nor altogether believed.

But, after an imperfect understanding has been allowed for, believed the rest of the way? No. The plot of *Shirley*, the incidents and situations, are, with one or two minor exceptions, wholly fictitious; and Charlotte told Mrs. Gaskell, plainly, that she tried to depict Emily "*as she would have been . . . in health and prosperity.*"<sup>1</sup> This brings up the question, how would health and riches have changed Emily's character? That is what Charlotte asked herself. In the main (that is, maugre two or three illnesses of childhood and adolescence) Emily had uniformly good health; certainly up to the time she went to Law Hill; up to twenty-one, the age at which Shirley is introduced. Giving her health, then, is not a great gift. Is wealth? Yes. Yes, though never poverty-stricken, she was poor, and wealth would have made a vast difference—indirectly. It would have spared her Cowan Bridge with its dark memories, and perhaps the deaths of Elizabeth and Maria. It would have removed the necessity for physical labour. As under a genial sun, her soul would have expanded and been less austere. And she would never have gone to Law Hill. All of which differences would have made a mighty difference.

What is wealthy Shirley then? Basically Emily—since neither health nor wealth, nor their fluxes, affect the fundamental man. But Emily softened and brightened; Emily with her fierce delight accentuated, and her depressions, forebodings and resentments muted; Emily civilized. Charlotte wrote *Shirley* at a time when she simply had to portray Emily liberated. It was atonement; a trying to make up to Emily for everything, if only on paper. For Charlotte herself had been one of the cords which bound.

Why then if the dross of undeliberate and deliberate fiction so outweighs the gold of truth, is it worth while to attempt to refine out the gold? Because, though beyond a certain point Charlotte was ignorant of Emily and could not depict her, up to that point she knew her intimately; knew her as no one else knew her in the world. Because, though Charlotte tampered with Emily's moods and dis-

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 414.

position, for fiction purposes, and private purposes, much she did not tamper with: face, figure, demeanour, some mannerisms and many distinguishing traits. These she had no reason to distort and every reason to preserve. As an artist she was able to preserve them. Therefore, without fear of falsity, we may take certain passages as true testimony and authentic revelation.

Throughout, Shirley is called "the heiress." Emily was an heiress, though not to a Fieldhead, not to a mill in the hollow, not to a thousand pounds a year: to something at once less and more substantial. Shirley's blood was "pure and ancient"; so was Emily's, but not from the chromosomes of the Pruntys, the McClorys, the Branwells or the Carnes. It does not matter whether this symbolism was conscious, instinctive or accidental on Charlotte's part: it is splendid symbolism.

Shirley sometimes spoke as a child. There is no doubt that Emily was in many ways a child till she died. Ellen Nussey has said: "On top of a moor or in a deep glen Emily was a child in spirit of glee and enjoyment, or when thrown entirely on her resources to do a kindness."<sup>1</sup> This was in her younger years, but even in maturity she enjoyed, as she suffered, with wonder and whole-heartedness. As for Shirley: "What a child she is sometimes! What an unsophisticated, untaught thing!" And on another page: "How will she take the message? Naïvely or disdainfully? Like a child or like a queen? Both characters are in her nature."

How like Charlotte's direct testimony of her sister:

"In Emily's nature the extremes of vigour and simplicity seem to meet. Under an unsophisticated culture, unartificial tastes, and an unpretending outside, lay a secret power and fire that might have informed the brain and kindled the veins of a hero; but she had no worldly wisdom; her powers were unadopted to the practical business of life; she would fail to defend her most manifest rights, to consult her most legitimate advantage. An interpreter ought always to have stood between her and the world. Her will was not very flexible. . . . Her temper was magnanimous, but warm and sudden."<sup>2</sup>

With that general characterization in mind, what of Shirley's looks—that face and figure which elude us in the

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 273.

<sup>2</sup> Biographical Notice.

poor painting, and copy of a poor engraving, which have survived the years? "Shirley Keeldar was no ugly heiress. She was agreeable to the eye. . . . She was gracefully made, and her face, too, possessed a charm as well described by the word grace as any other. It was pale naturally, but intelligent, and of varied expression. She was not a blonde. . . . Clear and dark were the characteristics of her aspect as to colour. Her face and brow were clear, her eyes of the darkest gray (no green lights in them—transparent, pure, neutral gray), and her hair of the darkest brown. Her features were distinguished —by which I do not mean that they were high, bony, and Roman, being indeed rather small and slightly marked than otherwise, but only that they were, to use a few French words, '*fines, gracieux, spirituels*.'" Shirley wore her hair "parted on one temple, and brushed in a glossy sweep above the forehead, whence it fell in curls which looked natural, so free were their wavy undulations." She was "an erect, slight girl" with a "shaft-straight carriage." Caroline Helstone her friend recognised a shadow at night. "Who else," she thought, "has a shape so lithe, and proud and graceful? And her face, too, is visible . . . careless and pensive, and musing and mirthful, and mocking and tender. Not fearing the dew she has not covered her head"—that "picturesque head." Moreover, Shirley had quick vision, as if "the secret of her eagle acuteness might be read in her dark gray irids . . . those discriminating and brilliant spheres." Her eye dominated her face for "her nature was in her eye," a "large gray sphere." In her good-natured moments it was "full of lazy softness"; in fits of anger it was "fulgent with quick-flashing fire." All in all, "Sir—Sir—I say . . ." said Robert Moore, "she has a look at times of a thing made out of fire and air, at which I stand and marvel." At another time he said (and he was not in love with her): "But then she is handsome, peculiarly handsome. Hers is a beauty that grows on you. You think her but graceful when you first see her; you discover her to be beautiful when you have known her for a year." And Caroline cried: "Shirley, how your eyes flash!" And Shirley, meaning to explain a temporary phenomenon, unaware explained the whole cast of her countenance: It was so, she said, "because my soul burns."

Her manner was in keeping; it matched. But to get a clear sense of her manner it is necessary to piece together



many references, for like her nature it was not simple and single but composite.

She asked a question of a visitor "in a manner that would have been patronizing if it had not been extremely solemn and simple." After presenting a nosegay, "she put her hands behind her, and stood bending slightly toward her guest, still regarding her, in the attitude and with something of the aspect of a grave but gallant little cavalier." With a gentleman whom she respected she "took a tone at once animated and dignified, confidential and self-respecting. When, however, the candles were brought in, and the fire was stirred up, and the fullness of the light thus produced rendered the expression of her face legible, you could see that she was all interest, life, and earnestness. There was nothing coquettish in her demeanour. . . ." Caroline noted that when animated "her carelessness quite vanished, the wistfulness became blent with a genial gaiety, seasoning the laugh, the smile, the glance, with a unique flavour of sentiment, so that mirth from her never resembled 'the crackling of thorns under a pot'." She had a direct way of speaking and of acting—direct almost to bluntness; and a habit of "sharp sudden turns"—"home-thrusts"—wheeling quickly to ask a question. At a Church party, "'Were no refreshments sent?' asked Shirley, while her countenance, hitherto so clear, propitious and quiet . . . suddenly turned dark and warm." When roused, "she started up, walked twice fast around the room in the way that *she* only does, and no other woman." At bay, she tried to put Louis Moore off "with jests and jibes in her queer provoking way . . . waxing disdainful, half insulting: pride, temper, derision, blent in her large fine eye, that had just now the look of a merlin's." At such times, when her movements were "all haughtiness and fire and impulse," he called her "sister of the spotted, bright, quick, fiery leopard." "I am not afraid of you, my leopardess," he said, and she was glad. From the beginning she had longed to meet "one who would sincerely make her feel that he was her superior . . . the higher above me"—and this was so characteristic of Emily—"so much the better. It degrades to stoop; it is glorious to look up." Later Shirley broke down and said a thing bitterly true of her counterpart: "My heart craves to be fed. If you knew how hungry and ferocious it is, you would hasten to stay it with a kind word or two." Allied to this is quite a different passage. Louis Moore said, "We all want a friend, do we

not?" and Shirley answered; "All of us that have anything good in our natures." Thus Shirley's manner ran a gamut from rigidity to easiness, from hauteur to humility. But the latter was possible only when she had found a love to take all she had to give; and this did not happen to Emily. . . . Shirley was not demonstrative: "was chary of showing her feelings." The scene in which Shirley finds Caroline recovered from her dangerous illness is a good example of this inwardness of emotion "On her entrance her feelings were evinced in her own peculiar fashion. When deeply moved by serious fears or joys she was not garrulous. The strong emotion was rarely suffered to influence her tongue, and even her eye refused it more than a furtive and fitful conquest." Altogether, in respect to Shirley's manner, "There is a curious charm about her," said Hall. "A curious charm!"

Even in one of her passions (which is the test) she did not vulgarize herself. "Her features . . . were not distorted; they were fixed, but quite beautiful. She scarcely looked angry, only resolute, and in a certain haste; yet one felt at such times that an obstacle cast across her path would be split as with lightning." And again: "Shirley, so seldom haughty, looked so now. Her slight frame became nerved; her distinguished face quickened with scorn . . . her nostrils dilating. . . ." And still again: "Her countenance changed magically. With a sudden darkening of the eye and austere fixing of the features she demanded, 'Have you been asked to interfere?' . . ." And elsewhere: "She rose, and grew tall, she expanded and refined almost to flame. There was a trembling all through her, as in live coal when its vivid vermilion is hottest . . ." And once Shirley cried: "There are certain phrases potent to make my blood boil." She was "fair and imperial." On occasion she "felt insurrection and woke to empire."

And what is all this if not Charlotte's attestation of Emily's power? "I saw power in her," said Robert Moore. "She wears armour under her silk dress," said Caroline, "which you cannot penetrate." Shirley's carelessness was power sure of itself and so off guard; it "never compromised her refinement" but was "the very loophole" through which could be seen "the reality, depth, genuineness of her refinement." Her foibles were the amusements of power; her stoicism was power fearless ("I believe, sir, that if she were dying, she would smile and aver, 'Nothing ails me'");

her sarcasm bitter power; her energy natural power of constitution; her laughter spiritual power—for as Ninon de Lenclos said, “joy is the measure of our force.”

But is not power a masculine rather than a feminine quality? Precisely. There is overwhelming evidence that Emily had a distinct masculine streak. The villagers thought her “more like a boy than a girl.”<sup>1</sup> She called herself a boy in her poems and her pseudonyms, alter-egos and nicknames were almost all male: King Julius, Alexander, A. G. Alaisda, Captain Cory, the Major. In this she is paralleled by Shirley, whose parents had given her a masculine family cognomen because they had so longed for a son. Shirley was called Captain Keeldar, from her appearance and deportment, and was happiest when so denoted. But Mrs. Pryor was troubled. When Shirley began, “If I had had the bliss to be really Shirley Keeldar, Esq., lord of the manor,” Mrs. Pryor interrupted her—as Aunt may very well have interrupted Emily. “My dear, do not allow that habit of alluding to yourself as a gentleman to be confirmed. It is a strange one. . . .” It was indeed strange.

Shirley was physically fearless. She remained calm “when Mr. Wynne’s great red bull rose with a bellow before her face . . . stooped his begrimed, sullen head, and made a run.” She could use Mr. Helstone’s brace of pistols; if need be, she could plunge the long sharp knife. She was wilful; she was resolute; like Emily (according to Ellen Nussey) she “was in the strictest sense a law unto herself.”<sup>2</sup> She was “sure-footed and agile; she could spring like a deer when she chose.” . . . She did not cling to anyone; was very independent. Once when marriage was broached she said, “I could never be my own mistress more. A terrible thought! It suffocates me! Now . . . I can fold my independence round me like a mantle, and drop my pride like a veil.” She “gnawed her chain . . . the white teeth working at the steel.” When pleased, “‘good,’ Shirley pronounced” laconically, like a boy.

Shirley did not care for sewing, though she had it to do. Her “study was the rug, her seat a footstool, or perhaps only a carpet.” So Emily, accustomed to lying on the moors, flung herself on the floor at the Parsonage. In later years that was the place and that the position in which Mary Taylor remembered her. . . .<sup>3</sup> When pressed to her last endurance Shirley could wither with words: “Mr. Sympton

<sup>1</sup> Wilson, 122.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 273.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 137.

... I will bear no more. Your thoughts are not my thoughts, your aims are not my aims, your gods are not my gods. . . . You annoy me with small meddling, with petty tyranny. . . . As to your small maxims, your narrow rules, your little prejudices, aversions, dogmas, bundle them off. Mr. Sympson, go. I wash my hands of the lot. I walk by another creed, light, faith, and hope." If this is not an echo of Emily's actual words on a similar occasion, it is Emily's spirit.

Not that her streak of masculinity (a broad, not a pin stripe) robbed Shirley of gentleness. "That look of pity," marvelled Louis Moore, "that gentle touch."

She loved the lazy life of the five senses. "In Shirley's nature prevailed at times an easy indolence. . . . Often, after an active morning, she would spend a sunny afternoon in lying stirless on the turf, at the foot of some tree of friendly umbrage. . . . No spectacle did she ask but that of the deep blue sky . . . no sound but that of the bee's hum, the leaf's whisper. . . ." Shirley had noted and could describe all fluctuations of weather and cloud. She chirruped and whistled like birds. And when she wished, she walked at night, in spite of others' protests, "for the mere pleasure of seeing the stars." One Sunday Caroline tried to get her to go into Church. "I will not," she said. "I will stay out here with nature. I love her—undying, mighty being. . . . Hush, Caroline! You will see her and feel her as I do if we are both silent."

Allied to love of nature was love of books. In both she sought the beautiful and good. For though Shirley was rich, "her mind ran on other things than money and position." She was "as tenacious of her book as she was lax of her needle." "O uncle," said Shirley, "there is nothing really valuable in this world, there is nothing glorious in the world to come that is not poetry!" But she had a critical faculty. "Few, Shirley conceived, men or women have the right taste in poetry, the right sense of discriminating between what is real and what is false. She had again and again heard very clever people pronounce this or that passage, in this or that versifier, altogether admirable, which, when she read, her soul refused to acknowledge as anything but cant, flourish and tinsel, or at the best, elaborate wordiness, curious, clever, learned, perhaps, haply even tinged with the fascinating hues of fancy, but, God knows, as different from real poetry as . . .

the milliner's wreath is from the fresh-gathered lily of the field." And again: "Milton was great," she said; "but was he good? His brain was right; how was his heart?" In another scene Caroline started to repeat at random Cowper's "The Castaway"—a poem which Mary Taylor said "was known to them all" at the Parsonage and not only appreciated but "practically appropriated."<sup>1</sup> Shirley urged Caroline to go on, as the storm raged and the shipwrecked mariner sank.

No voice divine the storm allayed,  
No light propitious shone,  
When, snatched from all effectual aid  
We perished—each alone!  
But I beneath a rougher sea,  
And whelmed in deeper gulfs than he.

Whereupon the two girls discussed poetry-writing as a means of "allaying emotions when their strength threatens harm"; and Shirley said, "One could have loved Cowper if it were only for the sake of having the privilege of comforting him"; and Caroline replied: "You never would have loved Cowper. He was not made to be loved by woman." "What do you mean?" "What I say. I know there is a kind of natures in the world—and very noble, elevated natures too—whom love never comes near. . . . And what I say of Cowper I should say of Rousseau. Was Rousseau ever loved? He loved passionately; but was his passion ever returned? I am certain, never. And if there were any female Cowpers and Rousseaus I should assert the same of them."

Shirley, however, was interested in a little problem of her own:

" 'Do you like characters of the Rousseau order, Caroline?'

" 'Not at all, as a whole. . . . Certain divine sparks in their nature dazzle my eyes, and make my soul glow. Then, again, I scorn them. They are made of clay and gold. The refuse and the ore make a mass of weakness: taken altogether, I feel them unnatural, unhealthy, repulsive.' "

Shirley's rejoinder was a subtle reproach to Caroline (the mask of Charlotte herself, in passages like this). Does this conversation blindly repeat an actual one? Shirley replied:

" I dare say I should be more tolerant of a Rousseau than you would. . . . Submissive and contemplative yourself, you like the stern and the practical! "

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 137. Anne wrote a poem, "To Cowper."

Shirley had humour—the same “spell of mischief” Ellen Nussey mentioned as Emily’s.<sup>1</sup> She was “ever ready to satirize her own or any other person’s enthusiasm.” She was in a grim mood with her uncle:

“ ‘I have been in love several times.’

“ ‘This is cynical.’

“ ‘With heroes of many nations.’

“ ‘What next——’

“ ‘And philosophers.’

“ ‘She is mad——’

“ ‘Once I loved Socrates.’

“ ‘Pooh! No trifling, ma’a n.’

“ ‘I admired Themistocles Leonidas, Epaminondas.’

“ ‘Miss Keeldar——’

“ ‘To pass over a few centuries, Washington was a plain man, but I liked him ; but to speak of the actual present——’ ”

She could mimic. When Louis Moore had recited *Le Cheval Dompté* “she took his very tone; she seized his very accent; she delivered the periods as he had delivered them.”

She did not wish to make friends outside of her circle. But when she found her tenants huddled in gossiping groups, “she bade them good-morning with a certain frank, tranquil ease, the natural characteristic of her manner when she addressed numbers, especially if those numbers belonged to the working class.” And again: “She was cooler among her equals, and rather proud to those above her.”

To make Shirley more Emily, Charlotte surrounded her with Emily’s own kin. Rev. Brontë, lopped here and elongated there, to fit the shoes and vestments of Rev. Helstone, yet retains his essential shape: a man who checks his liveliness with his cane and shovel-hat in the Rectory hall; who is “rather liberal than good-natured, rather brilliant than genial, rather scrupulously equitable than truly just.” Aunt Branwell is there too, as Mrs. Yorke, sourer, but recognizable by her “cap more awful than a crown” brought to the cottage “in a vast bag, or rather a middle-sized balloon of black silk, held wide with whale-bone” to protect the screed or frill a quarter of a yard broad and the “puffs and bows” of love-ribbon. Charlotte herself, looking out of Caroline’s eyes, speaks bitterly: “What does it signify whether unmarried and never-to-be-married women are unattractive and inelegant or not?

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 273.

. . . The utmost which ought to be required of old maids, in the way of appearance, is that they should not absolutely offend men's eyes when they pass them in the street." And she says to Shirley with touching affection: "It flashes upon me at this moment how sisters feel toward each other—affection twined with their life, which no shocks of feeling can uproot . . . affection that no passion can ultimately outrival. . . ." And when Mrs. Pryor reveals herself as Caroline's lost mother, Mrs. Brontë returns after dreary years: "She held her to her bosom; she cradled her in her arms."

Then there are the Yorkshire neighbours—"all as yielding to persuasion as they are stubborn against compulsion." Ellen Nussey dissolves into Charlotte, before Charlotte dissolves into Caroline Helstone. Mary and Martha Taylor, as Rose and Jessie Yorke, and their father as Hiram Yorke, are painted as carefully as the moors. It is the proper frame. Charlotte seems to say: The frame of places and people around an extraordinary individual are, for inscrutable reasons, not arbitrary; remove it, and the loss of so significant a complement is felt in a certain diminishment of strength in the individual. Or was it merely that Charlotte's mind was associative, and she needed copy? At all events Shirley seems more Emily because not isolated among unfamiliars.

The worshipping Keeper, of course, is at Shirley's side, unchanged, except for a more picturesque name—Tartar. He is a "rather large, strong, and fierce-looking dog, very ugly, being of a breed between mastiff and bulldog . . . posting directly to the rug;" and again: "a black-muzzled, tawny dog" with a "growl more terrible than the bark, menacing as muttered thunder;" and again: "an honest, phlegmatic, stupid but stubborn canine character" who "loved his mistress . . . but was mostly indifferent to the rest of the world." "Ladies generally like lap-dogs," observed the curate, Mr. Donne. "Perhaps I am an exception," Shirley replied coldly. When she heard Tartar's "bold scrape and strangled whistle" she ran to open the door for him; and when on a hot day he came in panting, she must "convoy him to the kitchen, and see with her own eyes that his water-bowl is replenished." Tartar stretched beside her "straight, strong and shapely as the limbs of an Alpine wolf," while "the hand of the mistress . . . reposes on the loving serf's rude head, because if she takes it away

he groans"—the very picture which Charlotte painted to Mrs. Gaskell of Emily.<sup>1</sup> When she walked over meadow and moor Tartar trotted beside her "with his wolf-like gallop, long and untiring." When he lay at her feet "all gory, stiff and swelled," she "wept furtively over him sometimes, and murmured the softest words of pity and endearment, in tones whose music the old, scarred, canine warrior acknowledged by licking her hand or her sandal alternately with his own red wounds." One is reminded of the story of how Emily, who had been warned that if she struck him he would throttle her, punished Keeper for persisting in sleeping on the beds at the Parsonage by holding him and punching his delicate nose—and then lavished upon him her love.<sup>2</sup>

Nor was Shirley without compassion for strange dogs. It was while trying to pat Phœbe, one of Mr. Sam Wynne's pointers, that a frightful accident happened. Since Charlotte related the same episode to Mrs. Gaskell, in reference to Emily, there can be no doubt of its authenticity. Phœbe—so Shirley told Louis Moore—drew blood biting her hand. Then Mr. Wynne's keeper came up with a gun, to inquire if the dog had passed. "She is raving mad," said the keeper

" 'And you told no one, sought no help, no cure? . . . '

" 'Yes. I walked straight into the laundry. . . . I took an Italian iron from the fire, and applied the light scarlet glowing tip to my arm. I bored it well in. It cauterized the little wound. . . . '

" 'I dare say you never once groaned.'

" 'I am sure I don't know. I was very miserable—not firm or tranquil at all, I think.' . . .

" 'You disdain sympathy.'

" 'Do I. . . ?'

" 'With your powerful mind you must feel independent of help, of advice, of society.'

" 'So be it—since it pleases you.'

" 'If it is not so, how is it then?'

" 'I don't know.'

" 'You do know, but you won't speak. All must be locked up in yourself.'

" 'Because it is not worth sharing.'

" 'Because nobody can give the high price you require for your confidence. . . . Nobody has the honour, the intellect, the power you demand in your adviser. . . . Of course you must live alone.'

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 274.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 275, 276.



“ ‘I *can* live alone, if need be. But the question is not how to live, but how to die alone. That strikes me in a more grisly light.’ ”

Shirley made Louis Moore promise to keep her secret.

“ ‘You know, in case the worst . . . should happen, they will smother me. . . . Now promise to befriend me. . . . Lock the chamber door against the surgeons . . . and if I give trouble, with your own hand administer . . . such a sure dose of laudanum as shall leave no mistake.’ ”

This episode in *Shirley* was written with an extra surety, as if Charlotte's amazing memory were easily passing a sharp test.

So Emily, like Shirley, kept the secret of her wound—the secret of herself.

What was her secret self?

That question is answered by compounding a number of statements about Shirley:

“To admire the great, reverence the good, and be joyous with the genial, was very much the bent of Shirley's soul. . . . A curious, magnanimous being.” Caroline told Robert Moore that once only she saw Shirley's heart. “ ‘Her heart's core?’ . . . ‘Her heart's core.’ ‘And how was it?’ ‘Like a shrine, for it was holy; like snow, for it was pure; like flame, for it was warm; like death, for it was strong.’ ” She had “bad points and grand points.” When Robert Moore asked, “Must I call Shirley a noble creature?” Caroline answered, “If you wish to speak the truth, certainly.”

Which is reminiscent of Ellen Nussey's tribute to Emily: “Her extreme reserve seemed impenetrable, yet she was intensely lovable. She invited confidence in her moral power.”<sup>1</sup>

It required all of her moral power to enter the narrow portal of Miss Patchett's School in September, 1837.

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 273.

## XVII

### AN ACADEMY FOR YOUNG LADIES

THE hill on which the school stood had given the house its name: Law Hill. The name has no grace; but neither has the house. It looks stern, as if determined not to concede anything. The front door has a harsh, high, graceless lintel. The door is painted red to-day; heaven knows what it was painted in Emily's day; probably a more sober colour. It is flanked by a pair of narrow windows as long as the door. The twin windows on either side shrink the further up they go, those on the third floor being the smallest. The house is grey stone. Extending to its left, and adjacent to a road which mounts Law Hill from Bairstow Common, lies a paved courtyard. The main house forms one side of that courtyard; a two-story L-shaped building, the west wing of which had been a warehouse and was then converted into a large schoolroom, forms the second and third sides; a wall the fourth. The wall is a continuation of the façade of the main house, and has an arched postern door in the middle. Behind the paved court are an old barn and stable, and mistal or cowshed. It is all quite grim: grim as Bairstow Common below, with St. Anne's-in-the-Grove in the distance, and a still more ancient church (now a stable), St. Anne's-in-the-Brears. Brears means briars.

When Emily arrived in late September dull autumn colours painted the hillside. The laurels and the sycamore on the sloped lawn were turning, and the bushes dropped dry leaves, so that patterns of branches and twigs confessed long-hid, essential shapes. When one is sad, the knife of beauty has a sharper edge.

Law Hill had been a gentleman's farmhouse. The ungracious refusal of beauty evident in its construction is a comment on the character of its builder, Jack Sharp. He was the nephew and adopted son of Mr. John Walker, squire of Walterclough Hall in Southowram and a merchant of great prestige. But Jack Sharp took after his disreputable father instead of Mr. Walker's sister. Unscrupulously he wrested away Mr. Walker's vast holdings, and, after his uncle's death, wasted his substance at Walterclough Hall, which he had mortgaged. Mr. Walker's blood-son John, returning from York one day, ordered his

overweening step-brother off the place. So about 1771 Jack built Law Hill on the proceeds of his uncle's business, while John Walker and his lovely wife and son and four daughters fought poverty at Walterclough Hall. They were proud people, the Walkers. Jack Sharp was not proud; like the devil, he was merely clever, grasping and conscienceless.<sup>1</sup>

This story of black-hearted Jack Sharp fascinated Emily, who had an ear for "the secret annals of every rude vicinage."<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after her arrival at Law Hill she wrote Charlotte in painful rebellion against her hard labour from six in the morning till near eleven at night; and Charlotte cried to Ellen, "This is slavery. I fear she will never stand it."<sup>3</sup> But it does not follow that Emily did not gradually or speedily find compensations in her exile. Perhaps her second letter home was resigned, and her third amiable. Tasks become easier when familiar; and time can modify even a fierce, fixed, preconceived idea that one is going to hate a thing. The outlook was indeed wilder and more bare than at Haworth. The undersides of sycamore leaves showed whiter when the wind passed. Emily started with long teaching-hours; but Miss Elizabeth Patchett the head mistress may have lightened the work for her new and weary governess; and no doubt the younger children, of whom she was in charge, quickly learned that nineteen-year-old Miss Brontë was not one to be trifled with. The school, founded twelve years ago in 1825, was famous. In spite of stark house and stark prospect, it was not a bad place at all.

Even when her sister Maria shared the administration, Miss Elizabeth had been the dominant personality; and now that Maria had married and removed to Dewsbury, Miss Elizabeth<sup>4</sup> ruled like a monarch. Tall and with hair in modish curls, she was considered a very beautiful woman. Teaching was more than a duty; she really liked it; and though a strict executive was loved as well as esteemed. She rode a side-saddle well, mounting from a stone block in the courtyard; and was an indefatigable walker who thought nothing of the four steep miles to Halifax, where

<sup>1</sup> *Transactions of the Halifax Antiquarian Society*, 1908; Simpson, 55.

<sup>2</sup> Preface to the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights*.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 162.

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Patchett married the Rev. John Hope, Vicar of Southowram, shortly after Emily's departure from Law Hill.

she was known as an eager patron of the arts. This was the woman from whom Emily took orders. Since Miss Elizabeth Patchett was more discerning and sensitive than Ellen Nussey, and Emily had come in time to like Ellen, when Emily's suspicion of strangers had worn off the nineteen-year-old girl and the forty-four-year-old woman must have found, evenings after the pupils were in bed, or on long chaperoned walks to see the stuffed birds in the Halifax Museum, some absorbing topics of conversation. Miss Elizabeth was not one to overlook merit: nor is it likely that she was without the necessary tact in approaching this all-but-unapproachable girl.<sup>1</sup>

If Emily rose at six, her classes doubtless began about seven-thirty, and as the days shortened into winter, seven-thirty grew darker and darker. She crossed the cold courtyard, her footsteps ringing on the hard stone, and went in at a door close to the road and up a flight of stairs in the former warehouse. Central heat had not been invented, and the large second-floor schoolroom in this building on top a hill caught and let through its cracks cold-lashing winds. The fireplace could furnish no more than an uneven heat friendly to draughts.<sup>2</sup> Emily taught about forty out of eighty pupils. One of them (who became Mrs. Watkinson of Huddersfield) has testified that in aggravating Miss Brontë one day they drew down on their heads her stinging remark that the house-dog was much dearer to her than they were. This is not surprising: Miss Brontë had had no experience with small children, but much experience with dogs—hers at home, Ellen Nussey said, “seeming to understand her like a human being.”<sup>3</sup> One wild duck, however, does not make an autumn; and the fact remains that the many pupils who remembered her in after years agreed that she was not unpopular.<sup>4</sup>

How long did Emily teach at Law Hill? Much depends upon the answer to this moot question. Eighteen years after Emily was at the Academy Ellen Nussey declared: “Emily Brontë went to Roe Head as pupil when Charlotte went as teacher; she stayed there but two months. . . . Emily was a teacher for one six months in a ladies’ school in Halifax or the neighbourhood.”<sup>5</sup> Now in a court of law the whole of that testimony would be suspect because the

<sup>1</sup> Simpson, 57.

<sup>2</sup> Private research.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 274.

<sup>4</sup> Chadwick, 123–125.

<sup>5</sup> *Life and Letters*, IV, 203.

first part of it can be proved to be wrong. Emily was at Roe Head over three months—from July 29 to well into November. Did not Ellen (who had never been close to Emily) make a correspondingly flagrant mistake in measuring her stay at Law Hill? Eighteen years is a long time to remember what one was never greatly interested in. Nor is Mrs. Gaskell more reliable on this point. She merely quotes Ellen Nussey; or Charlotte—notorious for confusing dates.<sup>1</sup> Then with the negative there exists some positive evidence. Mrs. Watkinson, who did not matriculate at Law Hill until October 1838, a year after Emily's arrival, has sworn that Miss Brontë, whom she remembered "quite well," was a teacher there during the winter of 1838–1839;<sup>2</sup> and as a reputable eye-witness must be listened to. Furthermore, nothing in Charlotte's letters or any other record of the year and a half thus indicated says that Emily was home for more than a few days at Christmas and the usual short holidays. Not till after Christmas 1838 is it established by the internal evidence of her poems that she was home to stay. Such evidence, though slippery, one can get one's teeth into. Then there is another argument, no less convincing, but bodiless: a matter of the delicate psychological impress of experience upon soul, which becomes real to the investigator only when he has felt his way—difficult groping!—to the heart of certain values. This is the plain truth: Law Hill left a scar so livid, so incapable of entire healing, on Emily Brontë, that the wound which it commemorated could hardly have been inflicted hastily; the red-hot iron did not pass quickly and lightly; it pressed, it bored, it was not withdrawn till the damage was subcutaneous. One year and several months, far better than six months, accounts for the grave event in Emily's life which—as certainly as the sun rises and declines—happened at Law Hill.

On what authority rests so radical a statement? On the authority of Emily's poems, and of her subsequent life.

It is understood, of course, that deducing biography from a person's writings is a shaky business which often leads to subtle falsification. But it is not a deceptive method of discovery if the writer has used his work as a stop-gap for feeling, and if the explorer into hidden things is sensitive and careful. For where systems of corre-

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 166.

<sup>2</sup> Chadwick, 123, 124.

spondences exist (and nowhere are they so clear as in lyric poetry, unburdened of the heart) they have only to be deciphered. The proof that correspondences exist may be found—if proof be needed—in the work of certain writers the details of whose lives have been spread out for inspection: Keats', for instance, Christina Rossetti's, for instance. Knowing their lives, one sees how they give themselves away in their poetry. Knowing their lives, one understands the tenor of their writing as well as specific references. Does it work the other way around? Knowing the poetry, can one safely postulate thoughts, trends, events? In some instances, yes. In the instance of Emily Brontë, to some extent. But even a little truth, wrung from her poetry and prose, would be marvellous news. For those things which were most fundamental to her life and the formation of her character are not elsewhere chronicled.

What then did Emily write during her year and four months or so at Law Hill? And what if anything does it reveal of this crisis in her life? Having no friend, no other outlet, she desperately needed the outlet of poetry.

She arrived in the middle of September, the usual time for reopening schools, and on September 30 wrote a Gondal poem. It was not unnatural to revert at this time to Gondal symbols. Emily and Anne had elaborated the Gondal legend till they could not separate themselves from it nor it from them. In a moment of turbulent feeling it came to Emily's hand almost as readily as Greek mythology to the hand of the Greeks, or Irish mythology to the hand of Yeats, or—this is the soundest analogy—Blake's self-made and highly individual mythology to Blake. It was rich. It had the inestimable virtue of being personal while seeming to be otherwise.

The fantastic and stupendous history of the Gondals cannot be put together in its entirety from fragmentary references. These people on their island in the North Pacific are shadowy and flitting, yet epic in their largeness and splendour; and move us like "ancestral voices prophesying war." They are so savage and simple and weighted with connotation, they seem at times like figures that have survived in the race's memory and not the product of one or two fanciful minds. For they are heroes. It was as heroes that they ministered to and liberated Emily. Life is full of petty and higgling details; to escape their corrupting influence, one has to think on heroes; to identify one-

self with heroes. Then, at least at intervals, one can go through the mummerly of an everyday sordid ritual, making gestures, without being touched. Vast events comfort simply by their vastness, even when tragic. Emily's Gondal themes are on a scale with her Gondalians; they are such as occupied the ancients: captivity, defiance, exile, sudden death, martyrdom and love, magic and divination and lamentation. For central in the Gondal cycle is the idea of a woman's overwhelming passion for a defeated, dishonoured and outcast lover: a being at once evil and superb, tragic and doomed. Like the devil's his names are legion; but most often he is Julius Angora—King Julius—who loses traditional faith (that is why he is considered evil, though at bottom he is not so), lifting in the great cathedral "his impious eye"; and who is defeated in his prime. "King Julius left the south country, his banners all bravely flying," and remained in the dangerous north. Rosina was the woman who loved him passionately and whom he no less passionately loved. Other figures carve themselves out of an obscure mist and are resolved into that mist again: Glenedin<sup>1</sup> imprisoned for killing a tyrant; Douglas the wild rider; Queen Augusta the jealous and vengeful. But all the rest is of no import compared to the grievous fate of Julius. This "son of war and love" was doomed from childhood; his life but a shadowing forth of a dark destiny.

When Emily found herself in an alien place, with the bustle of eighty pupils and a large ménage visible and audible around her, she imagined herself one of the Gondal exiles—perhaps Glenedin. Her bedroom, the only spot in the establishment sacred to herself, became "a cell," and a cell denotes smallness. But not because of its smallness was this small room a cell. No box could be smaller than her pocket-in-the-wall at home, yet it had gained her freedom. Her room at Law Hill was a cell by the exigency of logic: it was a unit in the prison which kept her from coming and going as she pleased. And if a cell, a tomb. Imprisoned men are dead men. She thought of her family enjoying themselves in Haworth, and of those given over to gaiety here, afternoons and evenings; and everything was magnified by her bitter imagination. Who were the revellers?—her family? No, fellow-soldiers insensible to her cruel fate. Pupils? No, her subjects. But none regarded

<sup>1</sup> Also spelled Gleneden.

the feelings which corroded her breast: her appalling first-loneliness that was like death. Here is the poem of September 30:

The organ swells, the trumpet sounds,  
The lamps in triumph glow;  
And none of all those thousands round  
Regard who sleep below.

Those haughty eyes that tears should fill  
Glance clearly, cloudlessly;  
Those bounding breasts that grief should thrill  
From thought of grief are free.

His subjects and his soldiers there  
They blessed his rising bloom;  
But none a single sign can spare  
To breathe above his tomb.

Comrades in arms, I've looked to mark  
One shade of feeling swell,  
As your feet stood above the dark  
Recesses of his cell

Did this articulation of her sadness alleviate it? In her next poem, written in October, she enshrines the phrase "glad and glorious day" in the midst of brooding, and one infers that the pleasanter aspects of Law Hill were beginning to disclose themselves. But poets have less need for poetry as an outlet when they are happy; the light is sufficient unto itself; only darkness is recorded; and so a disproportionate emphasis falls on darkness. That is obviously true of Emily's life at Law Hill. Since she acknowledged the fact of a "glad and glorious day" why did she not write a whole poem about it? She did not choose to. Like many who revolt against darkness, she was half in love with it. Grief is bitter, but melancholy is sweet:

The old church tower and garden wall  
Are black with autumn rain,  
And dreary winds foreboding call  
The darkness down again.

I watched how evening took the place  
Of glad and glorious day;  
I watched a deeper gloom efface  
The evening's lingering ray.

And as I gazed on the cheerless sky  
Sad thoughts rose in my mind . . .

Here the poem breaks off. The imagery of church tower and garden wall suggests the view from Haworth Parsonage,



but applies equally well to the view from Law Hill, with St. Anne's not far off. How fine the poem is, especially the first stanza. It is fine precisely because it transcends and goes far beyond, in implications, the personal situation out of which it rose.

Her next poem, written October 14, is another Gondal mixture; it has a dash of melodrama; it is a little hysterical; decidedly it is not Emily at her best. One imagines her crouched in her cubby room, wherever it was in the three-storied building—probably in the back, up under the roof, since, as the least important location that would have been appropriate to an assistant governess—crouched there, with a pencil and sheet of paper and a black vision in her head, writing fast, then stopping, staring as the blind stare, suffering in the mind a torture more sharp than physical cramps; then the hand busy again, and a smile playing on the lips. To symbolize the fight waging in her she uses, instinctively, a Gondal battle, and describes almost too realistically "Tyndarum's fall":

In plundered churches piled with dead  
The heavy charger neighed for food . . .

But then the poem swerves. The part about Tyndarum is called a dream. A new dream? Or a Haworth dream retold?

But dreams like this I cannot bear,  
And silence whets the fang of pain;  
I felt the full flood of despair  
Returning to my breast again.

My couch lay in a ruined hall  
Whose windows looked on the minster-yard,  
Where chill, chill whiteness covered all,—  
Both stone and urn and withered sward.

Again, it could be Haworth; or, if the minster-yard is conceived of as not so pressingly near, Law Hill. But the next line proves the location fanciful:

The shattered glass let in the air . . .

Neither the Rev. Brontë nor Miss Elizabeth Patchett ever condemned her, in October or any month, to a room with broken window-panes.

One black yew-tree grew just below. . . . There was none at the Parsonage, none at the Academy. This yew-tree

is stage-property and very effective. A pleasant tree like an actual sycamore would not do. In the poem she hears its boughs tapping an old vault's rail and for a shuddering moment thinks the sound may be "life still lingering in some deserted heart"—and again is dreaming "an undefined, an awful dream, a dream of what had been before." She gets up; hurries down a dark oak stair; and opens the door on icy moonlight—and a

Wide heaven where every star  
Stared like a dying memory.

There stood the great cathedral. But suddenly time switches again. It is no longer midnight:

'Tis evening now: the sun descends  
In golden glory down the sky;  
The city's murmur softly blends. . . .

Ah, Emily is up to her old trick of enlarging the world. A small church has become a cathedral "discrowned, but most majestic so"; the village of Haworth or Southowram—or is it the town of Halifax?—a city to conjure with.

And yet it seems a dreary moor,  
A dark October moor to me;  
And black the piles of rain-clouds lower  
Athwart heaven's stony canopy.

There, at the end, the uneasy phantasmagoria is turned into poetry. Emily could always depict hopelessness better than ghastliness.

The other two poems dated October 1837 are as autobiographical as possible. "Lines" commences with another magnification:

Far away is the land of rest;  
Thousand miles are stretched between . . .

Eleven or twelve were, at the most. But what of it? She was a poet, not a mathematician. And a poet weary of a month-old academic grind—weariness to death, as the saying goes. So both the place of her exile and her home took on a larger connotation:

Wasted, worn is the traveller,  
Dark his heart and dim his eye;  
Without hope or comforter,  
Faltering, faint, and ready to die.

Often he looks to the ruthless sky;  
 Often he looks o'er his dreary road;  
 Often he wishes down to lie  
 And render up life's tiresome load.

But yet faint not, mournful man;  
 Leagues on leagues are left behind  
 Since your sunless course began;  
 Then, go on, to toil resigned.

If you still despair control,  
 Hush its whispers in your breast;  
 You shall reach the final goal,  
 You shall win the land of rest.

The other October poem is a variation on the theme of homesickness:

Sleep brings no joy to me,  
 Remembrance never dies;  
 My soul is given to misery,  
 And lives in sighs.

Sleep brings no rest to me;  
 The shadows of the dead,  
 My awakening eyes may never see,  
 Surround my bed.

Sleep brings no hope to me;  
 In soundest sleep they come,  
 And with their doleful imagery  
 Deepen the gloom.

Sleep brings no strength to me,  
 No power renewed to brave:  
 I only sail a wilder sea,  
 A darker wave.

Sleep brings no friend to me  
 To soothe and aid to bear;  
 They all gaze on,—how scornfully!  
 And I despair.

Sleep brings no wish to fret  
 My harassed heart beneath:  
 My only wish is to forget  
 In endless sleep of death.

With its refrain it is a sad song, a little romanticized, but honest. From the biographical standpoint it adds practically nothing beyond the interesting fact that during insomnia Emily fancied that she saw some who had died—her mother, Maria and young Elizabeth—standing at her bedside, but not to comfort. Her wish for death seems conventional here. She was not yet *in earnest* about death.

The next month, November, was a very important month in Emily's life. Her work was getting a little easier, if only because less strange: she knew her fellow-teachers, and the children; had completely won the house-dog; could speak with ease to Mrs. Earnshaw and the other servants; had mastered the intricate premises and the quaint village of Southowram, nearby, and smoky Halifax, below, and the surrounding moors, studded at great distances with ancient halls and messuages but dark after her own heart's desire. There was much more to interest her here than at Roe Head. And yet on a deep level she was unoriented; she pined; and about this time, whether constantly or in a passing moment, considered throwing it all up. But pride, which remembered her inglorious retreat from Roe Head, stiffened her resistance. She would stick it out:

The night is darkening round me,  
The wild winds coldly blow;  
But a tyrant spell has bound me,  
And I cannot, cannot go.

The giant trees are bending  
Their bare boughs weighed with snow;  
The storm is fast descending,  
And yet I cannot go.

Clouds beyond clouds above me,  
Wastes beyond wastes below;  
But nothing drear can move me:  
I will not, cannot go.

And then this same November something happened which changed the world. She who was still in the flesh set up a relationship with the disembodied.

It was the first time she had consorted with the Absolute, but they were not unacquainted. From her earliest childhood the dove had brooded over her without settling: especially on the moors, especially when she was alone. It had been a power and a presence to which she gave no name but which she recognized as one recognizes a rustle of skirts, though no figure emerges from the door or sweeps across the grass. She had longed for that beautiful drawing-near. She had been baffled of it a hundred times. And now, in marvellous charity, it "came in and supped with her." In the purest sense, though only at moments, she was one with Porphyry and Plotinus, Parmenides and Blake. She

had seen and would see again a vision of that over-all reality which melts as in a crystal the painful vicissitudes of earthly life. And the Absolute promised:

I'll come when thou art saddest,  
Bring light in the darkened room,  
When the rude day's mirth has vanished,  
And the smile of joy is banished  
From evening's chilly gloom.

I'll come when the heart's worst feeling  
Has entire, unbiassed sway,  
And my influence o'er thee stealing,  
Grief deepening, joy congealing,  
Shall bear thy soul away.

Listen! 'tis just the hour,  
The awful time for thee:  
Dost thou not feel upon the soul  
A flood of strange sensations roll,  
Forerunners of a sterner power,  
Heralds of me?

It is useless to inquire from whence this mystical experience. Emily had had no metaphysical training; perhaps had never read, perhaps never heard of, the great metaphysicians. What matter? With its birth into this world, each soul has its secret proclivities. Emily had always a distrust of the material event, and with time grew all but indifferent to it; she loved the real as opposed to appearance; her dream was more substantial than that which has weight and occupies space.

But the mystic experience did not make her entirely self-sufficient because it was not continuous: Porphyry's master attained bliss but four times in six years, and Porphyry himself but once. So, as a human being, Emily had to suffer. She who had tasted the Absolute, in a relative order of things, hungered for the Absolute. Her father the minister if shown a literal transcript of her thoughts would have considered her mad. Charlotte and Anne, who were also orthodox Church of England, were already lovingly certain she was queer. But Porphyry would not have agreed, nor Plotinus, nor Parmenides, nor St. John of the Cross, nor Thomas Traherne, nor Swedenborg, nor Blake.

This mystic liberation she was to describe, later, in a poem called "the Prisoner":<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> October 9, 1845.

A message of Hope comes every night to me,  
And offers for short life, eternal liberty.

He comes with western winds, with evening's wandering airs,  
With that clear dusk of heaven that brings the thickest stars.  
Winds take a pensive tone, and stars a tender fire,  
And visions rise, and change, that kill me with desire.

Desire for nothing known in my maturer years,  
When joy grew mad with awe, at counting future tears.  
When, if my spirit's sky was full of flashes warm,  
I knew not whence they came, from sun or thunder-storm.

But, first, a hush of peace—a soundless calm descends;  
The struggle of distress, and fierce impatience ends;  
Mute music soothes my breast—a nuttered harmony,  
That I could never dream, till Earth was lost to me.

Then dawns the Invisible; the Unseen its truth reveals;  
My outward sense is gone, my inward essence feels:  
Its wings are almost free—its home, its harbour found,  
Measuring the gulf, it stoops—and dares the final bound.

Oh dreadful is the check—intense the agony—  
When the ear begins to hear, and the eye begins to see;  
When the pulse begins to throb, the brain to think again;  
The soul to feel the flesh, and the flesh to feel the chain.

Yet I would lose no sting, would wish no torture less;  
The more that anguish racks, the earlier it will bless;  
And robed in fires of hell, or bright with heavenly shine,  
If it but herald death, the vision is divine!

She had become a visionary, and that is vision's *modus operandi*. The soul detaches from the body, is enraptured, and then in frightful anguish reconnects with the body.

It is a condition of mortality that even a great spirit drags a shadow. Emily's inner life was "luminous with intense realization" to a degree seldom vouchsafed to or achieved by a mortal: at times she could step aside from the stream of circumstances and let it flow past. But at other times she could not—she could not. That is the point.

She could not when she was humanly lonely. To share her soul's life there was only Anne—a poor substitute for the person she needed to fulfil her. She did not of course admit this, being loyal. She idealized Anne's sweet mediocrity, and continued in her thoughts and writing the Gondal habit of transforming herself into a tragic Romeo to play opposite Anne's languishing Juliet. The Romeo and Juliet had a plethora of names: they chose one and

then another capriciously. The Gondal fragments bear this out, and if Anne's and Emily's letters were extant undoubtedly they would too. It was a strange relation between sisters but quite innocent. By absorbing some of Emily's emotional energies it had stemmed off, for a while, an emotional catastrophe. . . .

In November, at the quickening of her mystic life, she wrote (or rewrote) a farewell to Anne vowing undying allegiance. Some of the terminology of erotic love is used, but this means no more than that Emily was ripe for erotic love, and with the licence of a romantic game unconsciously drew as near it as she could. If concrete proof that the poem is addressed to Anne were required, it resides in the words "at home" in the first stanza and "cherished and watched and nursed so long" in the last:

Now trust a heart that trusts in you,  
And firmly say the word, "Adieu";  
Be sure, wherever I may roam,  
My heart is with your heart at home;

Unless there be no truth on earth,  
And vows most true are nothing worth.  
And mortal man have no control  
Over his own unhappy soul;

Unless I change in every thought,  
And memory will restore me nought,  
And all I have of virtue die  
Beneath far Gondal's foreign sky.

The mountain-peasant loves the heath  
Better than richest planes beneath:  
He would not give one moorland wild  
For all the fields that ever smiled.

And whiter brows than yours may be,  
And rosier cheeks my eyes may see,  
And lightning looks from orbs divine  
About my pathway burn and shine;

But that pure light, changeless and strong,  
Cherished and watched and nursed so long,—  
That love that first its glory gave  
Shall be my pole-star to my grave.

The parting referred to had taken place in Haworth the previous summer, just before Anne returned to Dewsbury Moor and Emily went to Law Hill.

Another poem of this same November is less clear in its allusions:

I would have touched the heavenly key  
That spoke alike of bliss and thee;  
I would have woke the evening song,  
But its words died upon my tongue;  
And then I knew that he stood free,  
Would never speak of joy again,  
And then I felt . .

The poem breaks off as if, unaccustomed to the theme, her soul and hand faltered. In spite of Emily's fondness for Anne, "bliss" would seem to apply to a different kind of thing. Could Emily have met someone—in Halifax while leading a contingent of students, or in some manor to which she had been introduced by Miss Patchett, or in the school itself—on whom her fancy fastened?—someone whom she knew she *could* love, if she did not instantly do so? The first four lines plainly declare love and shyness (shyness being a new emotion, for she had always been reserved, not shy). But the next two and a half lines are obscure as night. Has some word been mis-written or mis-deciphered? Is the poem imagined from another's standpoint, so that she herself was the one—was "he"—who, for some reason, "would never speak of joy again"? Or is this a rare example of a strictly impersonal fragment? Only one point is clear. The episode, if there *was* an episode, immediately brought her to sorrow. Then, beyond recording the fact that the poem may have been written to or about someone other than Anne, nothing can be said. The follow-up clues are very faint for some time.

Emily's next poem is Gondal, but not pure Gondal—scarcely ever was her writing pure Gondal; that was the reason she continued this childhood game: it was so fine an outlet for pent feelings. The new poem has many elements, is fraught with desperate emotion and (not unnaturally in a crisis) invokes her mother—either her real one, or Maria the tender little mother by proxy, or a blending of both. Is its motive in the preceding fragment, though Emily does not admit this even to herself? She is churned up like a deep mill-pond. She feels cataclysm. She thinks that her life must end here, now—if not by God's ordinance, by her own. Verging on the hysterical, does she in her need for comfort put words of comfort into the mouth of the only person whose love she can count on—Anne, imagining her



pinning for Fernando, that is, Emily herself, who has gone away and no longer even writes letters; pining so sadly that poor Anne too has suicidal yearnings?

O Mother! I am not regretting  
To leave this wretched world below,  
If there be nothing but forgetting  
In that dark land to which I go.

. . . . .

Twice twelve short years,<sup>1</sup> and all is over,  
And day and night to rise no more,  
And never more to be a rover  
Along the fields, the woods, the shore . . .

This lamentation is elaborated through six more stanzas. Then comes the sad story of a parting.

Ten years ago<sup>2</sup> in last September  
Fernando left his home and you;  
And still I think you must remember  
The anguish of that last adieu.

And well you know how wildly pining  
I longed to see his face again,  
Through all the autumn drear declining,—  
Its stormy nights and days of rain.

Down on the skirts of Arden's forest  
There lies a lone and lovely glade;  
And there the hearts together nourished,  
Their first, their fatal parting made.

The afternoon, in softened glory,  
Bathed each green swell and waving tree;  
And the broad park spread before me  
Stretched toward the boundless sea. .

And there I stood, when he had left me,  
With ashy cheek and tearless eye  
Watching the ship whose sail bereft me  
Of life and hope, and love and joy.

The ship is an arbitrary symbol of departure. Like the rest of the images in this poem it heightens (as Emily meant that it should) the catastrophe of separation. Emily got some relief from such heightening, in the same way that people are momentarily relieved of toothache by pressing the tooth hard and making it hurt much worse.

<sup>1</sup> A poetic approximation. Emily was nineteen and a half; Anne less than eighteen.

<sup>2</sup> Emily's usual enlarging.

It passed: that night I sought a pillow  
 Of sleepless woe, and grieving lone  
 My soul still bounded o'er the billow,  
 And mourned a love for ever flown.

Yet smiling bright in recollection  
 One blissful hour returns to me:  
 The letter told of firm affection,  
 Of safe deliverance from the sea.

But not another: fearing, hoping,  
 Spring, winter, ha' ve't, glided o'er,  
 And time at length brought power for coping  
 With thoughts I could not once endure.

And I would seek in summer's evening  
 The place that was our last farewell;  
 And there a chain of visions weaving,  
 I'd linger till the curfew bell.<sup>1</sup>

This poem is not quoted for the sake of beauty; it has no real beauty. It is quoted for what it can yield autobiographically, though with a full understanding that, being extremely complicated, its explanation is bound to seem complicated too. Her mother is symbolic of the ultimate and withheld comfort; the sea stands for time, space—estrangement.

Three other poems were written before she rode the stage coach back over the stone-studded road, through Denholme and melancholy hills, to Haworth, for Christmas vacation. "Song by Julius Angora" is triumphant, and, to all intents, one of Emily's few strictly Gondal poems. Perhaps she woke one Sunday (her day of rest) to the sound of St. Anne-in-the-Brear's bell pealing, and in her elation imagined King Julius overcoming his enemies in the battle of Almedore:

Awake! awake! how loud the stormy morning  
 Calls up to life the nations resting round!  
 Arise, arise! is it the voice of mourning  
 That breaks our slumber with so wild a sound?

The voice of mourning? Listen to its pealing:  
 That shout of triumph drowns the sigh of woe;  
 Each tortured heart forgets its wonted feeling;  
 Each faded cheek resumes its long-lost glow.

Our souls are full of gladness; God has given  
 Our arms to victory, our foes to death;  
 The crimson ensign waves its sheet in heaven;  
 The sea-green standard lies in dust beneath.

<sup>1</sup> December 14, 1837.

Patriots! no stain is on your country's glory;  
 Soldiers! preserve that glory bright and free;  
 Let Almedore in peace and battle gory  
 Be still a nobler name for victory!

The poem is signed J. A. King Julius Angora was principal male personage into whom Emily liked to merge herself.

But in "Lines" she sinks to a mournful philosophy of death:

I die; but when the grave shall press  
 The heart so long endeared to thee;  
 When earthly cares no more distress,  
 And earthly joys are nought to me;

Weep not, but think that I have passed  
 Before thee o'er a sea of gloom;  
 Have anchored safe, and rest at last  
 Where tears and mourning cannot come.

. . . . .

But long or short that life may be  
 'Tis nothing to eternity:  
 We part below to meet on high,  
 Where blissful ages never die.

Does she address Anne; or that composite, non-existent and infinitely receptive person whom poets are forever addressing? Her grief and resignation, in comparison with earlier and later sentiments, seem a trifle literary. Nevertheless this is the beginning of an increasing disposition to look on death—paradoxically—as not only the ultimate enemy, but ultimate friend.

"To a Wreath of Snow" is a fanciful and very lovely reflection. Though she is still sad, still a "prisoner" in a "dungeon," her philosophy stands her in good stead. So evanescent a thing as a snowflake comforts her merely by coming from heaven and reminding her of a power not of this earth:

O transient voyager of heaven!  
 O silent sign of winter skies!  
 What adverse wind thy sail has driven  
 To dungeons where a prisoner lies?

Methinks the hands that shut the sun  
 So sternly from this mourning brow  
 Might still their rebel task have done,  
 And checked a thing so frail as thou.

They would have done it, had they known  
The talisman that dwelt in thee;  
For all the suns that ever shone  
Have never been so kind to me!

For many a week and many a day  
My heart was weighed with sinking gloom,  
When morning rose in mourning grey  
And faintly lit my prison-room.

But, angel-like, when I awoke,  
Thy silvery form so soft and fair  
Shining through darkness, sweetly spoke  
Of cloudy skies and mountains bare;

The dearest to a mountaineer,  
Who all life long has loved the snow,  
That crowned his native summits drear,  
Better than greenest plains below.

And, voiceless, soul's messenger,  
Thy presence woke a thrilling tone  
That comforts me while thou art here,  
And will sustain when thou art gone.

The poem brings up the question, whose hand did she think

shut the sun  
So sternly from this mourning brow

—God's, because His scheme is not to let anyone be too happy, or Papa's, because Papa had urged Law Hill?

In any case Emily, at this point, was granted a Christmas furlough.<sup>1</sup> Between Southowram and Haworth the moors were marked by upright painted white stoops. The prickly pronged leaves of the holly were dotted with red. Men were shooting green clusters of mistletoe, heavy with milky berries, out of high branches. The pupils had been glad to leave the teachers, and the teachers to get a brief respite.

<sup>1</sup> There is no direct evidence that Emily went home for Christmas, but since Haworth was only twelve miles away, on the coach line, and all schools habitually granted at least a month's holiday, there can be little doubt she did.

## XVIII

### CHRISTMAS AND A WARNING

THE reunion at Haworth was a great joy to everyone concerned—including Keeper, faithful to his mistress. How they scanned Emily's face—the dog, and old Tabby, and Papa, and Aunt, and Branwell, Charlotte, and Anne. It was the first time they had laid eyes on her since the radical experiment of Law Hill. Yes, she was changed. Anne wrote a poem, "The Captain's Dream"—exaggerating somewhat for effect, but revealing her horror at the mark of Law Hill, and the difficulty of slipping back on to their old intimate basis, after a lapse of time.

Methought I saw him, but I knew him not,  
He was so changed from what he used to be;  
There was no redness in his woe-worn cheeks,  
No sunny smile upon his ashy lips;  
His hollow, wandering eyes looked wild and fierce . . .

Oh! how I longed to clasp him to my heart,  
Or but to hold his trembling hand in mine,  
And speak one word of comfort to his mind. . . .

But the strangeness between them did not last. They had so much to tell around the grate fire while the coals glowed red—facts and insights omitted from letters. Branwell was the most voluble. Having joined the Freemasons in February 1836, he had acted for nearly the whole of 1837 as Secretary to the Lodge of the Three Graces; and been busy writing and painting. But loneliness was a dangerous condition, offering a thousand temptations to a young man with more dash and intelligence than the run of Haworth swains—a youth with hair like a reckless bonfire, and a rather patrician nose, but small eyes and a weak jaw. Branwell did not speak of these temptations to his returned sisters (as he had never spoken of them to his father). He exhibited his new pictures, and, still burning with ambition, bragged a little; and in spite of the fiasco of the Royal Academy, they believed in him all over again. Their own future they had suspicions about; but not his, when he talked. How splendid to be male and conquering! Branwell, on his part, for all his braggadocio, appreciated his sisters as never before. Absence makes the heart grow fonder—especially when cut off, in a bleak village grappled

to the steep side of a hill, from everyone with intelligent ideas about art.

But Emily—they were always interrupting themselves, and looping back on former conversations—did she still dislike Law Hill so much? Oh—it was not as bad as she had expected; she intended to stick. Did she get to Halifax often? Quite often. Did she go to church? Oh yes, with the school. Was Miss Patchett nice? As headmistresses went, yes, Emily supposed she was nice.

The circle was not deceived. Emily's wordlessness was a language to which years of association had furnished them with a glossary. In her a slight freezing of the air meant what a torrent of bitterness would mean in another. An eagle expression enmarbling the eyes was the ensign of a fierce resolution. She said the most when she withheld the most; but one had to be skilful in deciphering the subtle gradations of her silence. Poor Emily, her sisters must have thought (though phrasing it differently), she sets her face like flint, and will die before she will give up, she never completely resolved on Cowan Bridge, she was too young, or on Roc Head, for she didn't see the use of it, but she's mature now, and her sense of duty aroused, and she has set her face like flint. This is what her sisters thought, but Emily, who wished only to savour home again, and walk on Haworth moor, and lie in bed in her box-room looking up at the cold icicles of the stars, tried to change the subject. She talked more freely when the subject was not herself.

It was Anne she wanted to know about. Anne had always been frail, it was constitutional—but this winter frailer than ever, as if the first strong wind off the moor would blow her away. Oh but she's better, said Charlotte. So much better, said Anne. Then what, pray, had she been at Dewsbury Moor? Wretchedly ill, they admitted. Wretchedly ill. Emily's heart sank. Had Charlotte really had a row with Miss Wooler over it? Yes, Charlotte explained; for some time Anne had had a slight cough, a pain in her side and difficulty in breathing, and she, Charlotte, had been miserable—not being an uninterested person, after all—and Miss Wooler had thought her a fool, making a mountain out of a gopher hill, in other words tuberculosis out of a common cold; and to emphasize her disapproval had treated her with marked coldness; and one evening they had reached a little *éclaircissement* during which she, Charlotte, in a regular passion, had told Miss Wooler one or two rather

plain truths, and so set her crying for two days and two nights together; and then unknown to her, Miss Wooler had written Papa telling him that she, Charlotte, had reproached her bitterly, taking her, Miss Wooler, severely to task, and so forth and so forth; and the next day Papa had sent for her, Charlotte, and for Anne. Meanwhile she had formed a firm resolution to quit Miss Wooler and her concerns forever, but just before their departure, Miss Wooler had taken her, Charlotte, into her room and given way to her feelings, which in general she restrained far too rigorously, and confessed that in spite of her cold repelling manners she had a considerable regard for her former pupil and present assistant, and would be very sorry to part from her; and she, Charlotte, who couldn't help liking anyone who liked her, and who remembered that Miss Wooler had in general been very kind, had reluctantly agreed to come back after the holidays—but alone, of course—Anne was not to be risked (there was an ominous harking back to other days and other illnesses, when Charlotte said that); Anne must have proper care—though Charlotte admitted that her worst fears had been unfounded.<sup>1</sup>

Had been unfounded? Emily's sight was keen and her honesty to herself very great, and she saw in Anne's unnaturally chalky flesh, and the flushed spots high and too sudden on her cheekbones, and that fertile, feverish, hungry look common to the consumptive or almost consumptive, a warning of—what? A warning. The writing was on the wall. Security trembled on the edge of an abyss. To-day the piano yielded music when her hands strayed on the keyboard; Tabby was making cakes, and a good smell floated out through the kitchen door; Branwell was plunging here and there, rather brilliantly, among the words of the English language; Aunt was as active as a beaver, in antiquated headgear, her front of light auburn curls bobbing; Papa came out of his study, with his spectacles on his nose, and recounted one of his fascinating stories (he was better at talking than writing); Charlotte and Anne hugged the fire, luxuriating in idleness; neighbours put their heads in; the cut and fluted wine-glass<sup>2</sup> was full of wine, the small cut liqueur-glass with a rose and fern leaf border<sup>2</sup> brimmed with liqueur. Papa had said not to stint on peat this Christmas, all of the children were home and they must

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 163, 164.

<sup>2</sup> Museum.

celebrate, so the fire leaped and the house, to its last crack and cranny, was warm. It seemed as if all this must go on, not just till the end of January, but forever: it was solid and incontrovertible. Yet did not all material things have in them the seeds of their destruction?

If Emily had these thoughts, she shook them off. But to shake off a premonition is not always to dispose of it satisfactorily.



## XIX

### THE MOMENTOUS YEAR 1838

It is highly improbable that any new material pertaining to Emily Brontë will be discovered after this date. A hundred years is a complete revolution of the wheel. We are in as good a position, now, as we will ever be to plumb the mystery of 1838. Her poems, as sources, are fortunately far from barren. For 1838 was crucial in Emily's life. No one knows exactly what happened. No one will ever know. But a careful study of the lyrics, from which she could not withhold her deepest self, reveals the general if not the specific nature of the cataclysm. The theory, held so long, that nothing ever touched her in the way of personal passion is absolutely untenable. Something tremendous took place, and the years of her life, thereafter, were but a fighting with the long shadow cast by that event. She was neither more Emily nor less Emily because of it. In this, as in other adventures of her soul, she was simply following out inevitabilities.

The trouble, very definitely, had to do with some person; whether one apostrophized in the poem beginning "I would have touched the heavenly key"; or one met during the holidays at Haworth, or at Bradford, where she may have visited cousin William Morgan; or not encountered until after her return to Law Hill in late January.<sup>1</sup> Who, cannot be known. She met a person, loved that person, in a sense betrayed that person; yet in another sense it was that person who betrayed her—sometimes she thought the one, sometimes the other, till at last she was firmly convinced of and ready to defend her inner honour. But this is to anticipate.

It is not known whether she met her love in Haworth, Bradford, Southowram or Halifax—but it would seem that the fateful episode happened away from Law Hill, because in February she realized that her enforced return to Law Hill, to "chain and bar and dungeon-wall," was providential in that it saved her from a longer association and "deadlier thrall." She addresses herself, to calm herself:

Weaned from life and flown away  
In the morning of thy day;

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 164.

Bound in everlasting gloom;  
Buried in a hapless tomb.

Yet upon thy bended knee  
Thank the power that banished thee:  
Chain and bar and dungeon-wall  
Saved thee from a deadlier thrall:

Thank the power that made thee part,  
Ere that parting broke thy heart.

In the same month she wrote a quatrain full of splendid imagery for her soul's trouble:

Wildly rushed the mountain-spring  
From its source of fern and ling;  
How invincible its roar,  
Had its waters worn the shore.

Is her next poem, of February 20,<sup>1</sup> written to Anne, her first love, her new love's understudy, forerunner, innocent John the Baptist, as it were—whom she would always love, because it was her nature to be faithful? In Gondal lore Anne was sometimes Arthur *brother*. Emily could not get over her Christmas scare. Sickness suggested death, and in a poem she could confess it, as in life she could not. She fictionizes a little, hastening the spring. But why not change February to May? A poet, at the very least, has power over the seasons. Also, spurious details remove to a safer distance the terror that presses close. Emily, beset and harassed by actuality, unconsciously tries to impersonalize the burning truth, and so ease herself of its sting: simply another manifestation of the ancient instinct to self-preservation.

O wander not so far away!  
O love! forgive this selfish tear:  
It may be sad for thee to stay,  
But how can I live lonely here?

The still May-morn is warm and bright,  
Sweet flowers are fresh, and grass is green,  
And in the haze of glorious light  
Our long low hills are scarcely seen.

Our woods, even now their young leaves hide  
The blackbird and the throstle well;  
And high in heaven, so blue and wide,  
A thousand strains of music swell.

<sup>1</sup> Not completed till May 20.

He looks on all with eyes that speak  
 So deep, so drear a woe to me!  
 There is a faint red on his cheek  
 Not like the bloom I used to see.

Call <sup>1</sup> Death—yes, Death he is thine own!—  
 The grave shall close those limbs around,  
 And hush, forever hush the tone  
 I loved above all earthly sound.

Well, pass away with the other flowers:  
 Too dark for them, too dark for thee  
 Are the hours to come, the joyless hours,  
 That time is treasuring up for me. . . .

"O wander not so far away" refers of course to the wandering away of the sick. She tried to pull Anne back by the natural earth-things they had loved together. Anne has become male with Emily's own maleness, because, this being a deliberately-written and not a headlong poem, Emily had time and sufficient detachment to decide that she could not, by means of a tell-tale gender, admit even to herself that Anne was doomed. But Death—so Emily in this mood imagines—calls more effectively than she can call, drowns out her voice. She is resigned, even philosophical: like the flowers Anne will escape the frost; but not she—she knows the dark destiny which "time is treasuring up for her."

Then the poem veers suddenly from Anne to herself, and then, as suddenly, to a moral issue. The moral issue interests her on a profound level. Superficially she "drags it in." Yet the sequence is eminently right. Sickness made her think of death, and death, of moral issues. How could it be otherwise? She has forgotten Anne; she has forgotten herself. The question now is an universal one, and she returns to the lofty, unfaltering answer of an idealist, of one who has been reassured by the mystic experience:

If thou hast sinned in this world of care,  
 'Twas but the dust of thy drear abode:  
 Thy soul was pure when it entered here,  
 And pure it will go to God.

"Sinned": Emily was to speak often of sinning in the years to come; sin was to become a preoccupation, almost an obsession, as she traversed a great circle and came back to this simple explanation of dark acts.

<sup>1</sup> "Can" in one manuscript is obviously an error.

Meanwhile she who had repressed her desire (like a proud servant banking coals) was in love. Hopelessly in love from the evidence. At first she tried to put it out of mind, but that was useless, so she faced it: she brooded over what can only be interpreted as an actual scene.

It's over now; I've known it all;  
 I'll hide it in my heart no more,  
 But back again that night recall,  
 And think the sea-ful vision o'er.

The evening sun, in cloudless shine,  
 Had passed from summer's heaven divine;  
 And dark the shades of twilight grew,  
 And stars were in the depth of blue;

And in the heath on mountains far  
 From human eye and human care,  
 With thoughtful heart and tearful eye,  
 I sadly watched that solemn sky.

"It's over now; I've known it all." *All?* If not all, something so tremendous that it seemed all. And all, to Emily, would not have involved the body: the body, in great events, was non-existent.

Not only in love but in religion Emily clove straight through to ultimates. She was too honest to accept ready-made beliefs without testing them in the crucible of her own mind. She had been baptized and confirmed in the Church of England; but had never been orthodox, at an early age had silently taken exception to the views handed down from her father's pulpit. She could follow Christ but not St. Paul. Why is a Mediator necessary between ourselves and God? We are not separate from God. He is closer than hands and feet. Only, we must be aware of that closeness, else in our consciousness it is nullified, though it can never be nullified in the true, the invisible world. Like the great visionaries, she had felt that indissoluble bond, to the pitch of ecstasy. Yet to the world she was, or would have been if the world had known her views, less than a Christian: a pagan; like King Julius, who perjured himself by outwardly worshipping the old gods whom inwardly he had thrown off; heretic. She seems to have brooded over her apostasy, for she wrote a Gondal poem, this March, about King Julius which translates to a grand scale her weekly experience of kneeling in Church

according to a ritual she no longer believed in, and repeating a creed contrary to her richer faith:

King Julius lifts his impious eye  
From the dark marble to the sky;  
Blasts with that oath his perjured soul,  
And changeless is his cheek the while,  
Though burning thoughts that spurn control  
Kindle a short and bitter smile. . . .

She seems to have been troubled lest this was hypocrisy. But what could she do? She could not, a parson's daughter and a teacher in a respectable school, rise up and say, This that you cling to I left behind me long ago.

In May a fine succession of poems came from her now more skilful hand. As a soul she was mature. She hid from no issue. It must all be fought out—religion, and love, and loss. Her struggle became articulate in adequate imagery: for instance, the impatient rider breasting the tide, and being held back by a "stranger":

O hinder me by no delay;  
My horse is weary of the way;  
And still his breast must stem the tide  
Whose waves are foaming far and wide.  
Leagues off I heard their thundering roar,  
As fast they burst upon the shore;  
A stronger steed than mine might dread  
To brave them in their boiling bed.

Thus spoke the traveller, but in vain:  
The stranger would not turn away;  
Still clung she to his bridle-rein  
And still entreated him to stay.

It is very human, in love, to long to keep the beloved, and then suddenly to feel caught by love, stopped by love, and long to tear free.

But then, it appears, Emily's beloved, as if taking the hint, became (by Emily's standards) perfidious; perhaps only announced departure, at a secret meeting on the moors—but if that was all, that to Emily was treason. Emily the proud was rebuffed. Yet the beloved was still esteemed, and while Emily's hate mingled with love, was acknowledged a "noble foe":

Why do I hate that lone green dell?  
Buried in moors and mountains wild  
That is a spot I had loved too well,  
Had I but seen it when a child.

There are bones whitening there in the summer heat :  
 But it is not for that, and none can tell,—  
 None but one can the secret repeat,  
 Why I hate that lone green dell.

Noble foe, I pardon thee  
 All thy cold and scornful pride,  
 For thou wast a priceless friend to me  
 When my sad heart had none beside.

And leaning on thy generous arm  
 A breath of old times o'er me came;  
 The earth shone round with a long-lost charm :  
 Alas I forgot I was not the same.

Before a day—an hour—passed by,  
 My spirit knew itself once more;  
 I saw the gilded visions fly,  
 And leave me as I was before.<sup>1</sup>

Yet people have said that Emily Brontë lived and died without knowing what extra-family love was! How else can this poem be interpreted? A treachery enacted in a green dell poisoned the spot for her. Ever after the bones of dead hopes lay whitening. Friendship that had become love hardened into enmity, but an enmity not unsoftened by the old admiration. Emily had been happy with her love; the golden age of her younger years had recurred; she had forgotten the bitterness of the world—till treachery from the least-expected source, from her beloved, recalled it.

This and several other allusions would seem to prove that Emily in her off-hours surreptitiously met the person she loved; perhaps "slipped out"—it has been done hundreds of times in girls' schools. The opportunities at Law Hill were very meagre, but a brave heart and iron will may have managed the extremely difficult.

She lived under terrific tension. More than once her discipline of her young charges sharpened without apparent cause; more than once an exercise-book she was correcting wavered fantastically. Poetry was a boon. Whether it caught the overflow of her private emotions or was "made up," it was a vent. Some of her poems this year were Gondal and not very good: "Song,"<sup>1</sup> for instance, which is an unconvincing lullaby ending in a conceit; and "Glenden's Dream," which celebrates the incarceration of the hero who killed a tyrant and spends his time remembering his deed:

<sup>1</sup> May 9, 1838.

None need point the princely victim:  
 Now he smiles with royal pride!  
 Now his glance is bright as lightning;  
 Now the knife is in his side.

. . . . .

Shadows come! What means this midnight?  
 O my God, I know it all!  
 Know the fever-dream is over:  
 Unavenged, the Avengers fall! <sup>1</sup>

and "Douglas' Ride,"<sup>2</sup> a fast-moving ballad; "The Lady to Her Guitar," a romanticism,<sup>3</sup> and an artificial plaint to Geraldine.<sup>4</sup> She wrote these for distraction; they took her out of a prosaic and put her into a poetic world.

After the repulse—or whatever it was which betrayed—she was sad: sometimes wildly so, but sometimes quietly, with that deadly sadness which accepts, for what else can it do? In May when flowers were breaking mould she wrote:

Darkness was overtraced on every face,  
 Around clouded with storm and ominous gloom;  
 In hut or hall there was no resting-place:  
 'There was no resting-place but one—the tomb'

All our hearts were the mansions of distress,  
 And no one laughed, and none seemed free from care;  
 Our children felt their father's wretchedness;  
 Our homes, one, all, were shadowed with despair.

It was not fear that made the land so sad . . .

Then what was it? Emily never set down the fancied reason for this universal sadness elaborated from her own. The broken-off sentence moves us like a death. "It was not fear that made the land so sad . . ." Thus by imperceptible and for the most part unpretentious means Emily had become, in a little over a year, a first-rate poet.

In June she went home for a few days, perhaps between terms; perhaps only for a week-end, by special permission. Mary and Martha Taylor were there to enliven the scene. Was this their first visit, or had they come before? Certainly Emily had met them previously, for they lived in the Red House, Gomersal, near Roe Head, and had been for years, in Charlotte's affections, second only to Ellen Nussey. Mary (Polly) was a red-cheeked girl, almost pretty,

<sup>1</sup> May 21, 1838.

<sup>3</sup> August 30, 1838.

<sup>2</sup> July 11, 1838.

<sup>4</sup> October 17, 1838.

and extremely intelligent. Martha (Pag) was not in the least pretty but—as Ellen Nussey said—“something much better, full of change and variety, rudely outspoken, lively, and original, producing laughter with her own good-humour and affection.”<sup>1</sup> In the letter Charlotte wrote the day they left the merry party comes marvellously to life. Martha had “kept up a constant flow of good humour” and been “very fascinating”; and now was “chattering as fast as her little tongue could run” to I ranwell, who stood before her, laughing at her vivacity. Mary was playing the piano; and there was so much noise Charlotte could not think.<sup>2</sup>

Was Anne in the room too? It is hard to imagine Anne contributing to noise. Was Emily there? Did she sometimes play the piano for the others? Even before she took lessons, her performance had not only precision but feeling and spirit. “Aunt and my sisters unite in best love to you,” wrote Charlotte before she flung down her pen—but of course she may only have assumed that Emily would send best love if given the opportunity, or concluded that she *should*.

One hopes the laughter rang clear and was long drawn out that day. For it was a brightness won from darkness, and like all flame had presently to die. Mary Taylor was “far from well”; she had “frequent flushings of fever,” she breathed short and had a pain in her chest (almost exactly Anne’s symptoms some months before); and Charlotte was in an agony of concern, remembering her two sisters “whom no power of medicine could save”—little suspecting that it was Martha, the gay and irresponsible, whom the grave would claim first. Yes, one hopes the piano emitted only light tunes that day. It had been a severe winter and unusually late spring. Charlotte’s melancholy having weakened her health, she had quit Dewsbury some weeks before this modest house-party. Ellen had been sick in London. Anne had been sick. Emily had been having a wretched time, though one had to judge more by what she did not say about it than what she said. Papa had been suffering worse than usual from his “ordinary complaint,” dyspepsia.<sup>3</sup> To cap the gloom, Tabby, since her fall, had been getting lamer and lamer.

That was the immediate past. What would be the immediate future? And, more important, what the distant future? No answer was forthcoming that June day, as the

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 167.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 231-233.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 167.



eager young faces crowded around the piano. There were only trills, and arpeggios, and runs; and jokes and sallies and contagious laughter, with now and again a hint of serious meaning.

Perhaps it was on *this* occasion that Emily uttered some memorable, terse words. Mary mentioned that someone had inquired her religion with the idea of getting her for a partisan, and she had said that that was between God and herself; and Emily, lying on the hearthrug, exclaimed: "That's right."<sup>1</sup>

But because Emily's words were short does not mean her thoughts were short, as the piano tinkled and the little group bantered. She had something on her mind of which they had no inkling whatsoever.

During this June, whether at home or at Law Hill, she wrote nine poems, none of them longer than five lines, but all fine, with a quality of mystery, of terror and tenderness, characteristic of the mature Emily. It is as if her emotion had reached such a pitch she could only cry brief cries and was hardly aware of those:

'Twas one of those dark, cloudy days  
That sometimes come in summer's blaze,  
When heaven drops not, when earth is still,  
And deeper green is on the hill.

And this, plainly autobiographical:

Lonely at her window sitting,  
While the evening steals away;  
Fitful winds, foreboding, flitting  
Through a sky of cloudy grey.

And this, with its significant stress on "two":

There are two trees in a lonely field,  
They breathe a spell to me;  
A dreary thought their dark boughs yield,  
All waving solemnly.

And this marvellous fragment:

What is that smoke that ever still  
Comes rolling down that dark brown hill?  
Still as she looked the ebon clouds  
Would part, and sunlight shone between,  
But drearily strange, and pale and cold . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 137.

And this sad instruction:

Away, away! resign thee now  
To scenes of love, and thoughts of fear;  
I trace the figure on thy brow,  
Welcome at last, though once so dear.

And this quatrain, that is simplicity itself, but so moving:

It will not shine again;  
Its sad course is done;  
I have seen the last ray wane  
Of the cold, bright sun.

And this, which seems to be another recollection of the tragic scene in the "lone green dell," and is obviously related to the "None but one can the secret repeat . . ." written in May:

None but one beheld him dying,  
Parting with the parting day;  
Winds of evening, sadly sighing,  
Bore his soul from earth away.

And this, which says so much symbolically:

Coldly, bleakly, drearily,  
Evening died on Elbë's shore;  
Winds were in the cloudy sky,  
Sighing, mourning ever more.

And this, which may be her recognition, in retrospect, of the fact that home was now forever changed, because she was forever changed:

Old hall of Elbë, ruined, lonely now,  
Home to which the voice of life shall never more return;  
Chambers roofless, desolate, where weeds and ivy grow;  
Windows through whose broken panes the night-winds  
coldly mourn—  
Home of the departed, the long-departed dead.

One long poem was composed this same June, very obviously at home or in direct remembrance of home. It is Gondal, but contains evidence that Emily was for the moment actively identifying her domestic self with "rosy Blanche." Those at home had remarked on her diminished looks; so Emily, characteristically (like Anne in "The Captain's Dream"), magnified this, making the partial thorough. The reference to "noble birth," though fiction, is more true than the facts. How often the gifted dream

themselves almost or altogether royal—and are not mistaken. Here are two out of the six stanzas:

None of my kindred now can tell  
 The features once beloved so well:  
 These dark brown locks that used to deck  
 A snowy brow, in ringlets small,  
 Now wildly shade my sunburnt neck,  
 And streaming down my shoulders fall.

The pure bright red of noble birth  
 Has deepened to a gipsy glow;  
 And care has quenched the smile of mirth,  
 And tuned my heart to welcome woe.

During the summer of 1838 Branwell lodged with a Mrs. Kirby in Bradford, taking a studio on Fountain Street, and in spite of inexperience and indifferent talent procured a few commissions to paint portraits.<sup>1</sup> But Mr. Brontë was not relieved of supporting his son, for whatever Branwell earned he spent on drink, lounging at the convivial bar of the George Hotel with his cronies, J. H. Thompson the artist, John James the future historian of Bradford, Wilson Anderson a landscape painter, Geller a mezzotinto-engraver, Richard Waller a portrait-painter, and on occasion J. B. Leyland the sculptor.<sup>2</sup> Indeed the old Parson with his stipend of £200 a year was greatly drained since the collapse of the arrangement whereby Charlotte supported herself and clothed Anne with the slender emolument from her teaching at Dewsbury.

This is further, though only circumstantial, evidence that Emily was still at Law Hill. She would have been the first to feel that morally she could not go home. Did she ever take the twice-a-day coach from Halifax to Bradford to visit her gay brother? Her mother's cousin-in-law, the Rev. William Morgan, Vicar of Christ Church in Bradford, was sitting to Branwell for his portrait (though Cousin Jane was dead and the hump-nosed vicar had taken unto himself a second wife). And Emily knew others in Bradford: Nancy and Sarah Garrs, now respectably married; and Miss Fanny Outhwaite, Anne's godmother along with Mrs. Franks (who had died the previous September).

<sup>1</sup> Grundy says he achieved a "considerable success." This experience evidently followed his employment as an usher in a school in the vicinity "which he left in disgust; the lads having ridiculed his downcast smallness." (Grundy, 76.)

<sup>2</sup> Leyland, *passim*.

Still, it is unlikely Emily journeyed to Bradford. She had no love nor talent for a social life. She was not elastic. It severely taxed her energy merely to fulfil her duties as a teacher, while living in a world of the mind, apart. The transition from the immaterial to the material plane is painful for ingrown natures.

Emily had loved and then lost, and this summer she wrote Gondal poetry in an effort to forget—most of it feeble stuff, reflecting, indirectly, her dismay.

But this was not a period of unmitigated sadness. Being what she was, she fell a little in love with Beacon Hill, the high ground east of Halifax, and primeval Bairstow Common, and, southward, wooded Shibden Valley; and probably developed in her long walks a romantic interest in Walterclough Hall, home of the impoverished proud Walkers, and in ruined High Sunderland two miles from Law Hill. The latter mansion, of ornate and quaintly embellished seventeenth-century stone, encases in its shell a wooden edifice of medieval origin. Since Miss Patchett came of an old Halifax family and knew the vicinity well, she was no doubt acquainted with the Priestleys of High Sunderland; and since she made a habit of taking her pupils to places of interest, what more natural than that she should conduct them—and Miss Brontë—to that antique manor, to gaze in astonishment at the whimsical grotesque carving encrusted above the arch of the principal gate—a laughing mouth blowing a horn, leering faces, a misshapen nude, a gargoyle bird, two griffins and sundry coats of arms? Miss Patchett had a special reason for showing Miss Brontë this crumbling façade, for it was the subject of two plates in John Horner's folio, *Buildings in the Town and Parish of Halifax*, to which she had subscribed—and which, no doubt, Miss Brontë had leafed over in the school parlour. Also, the fascinating history of High Sunderland is contained in Watson's *History of Halifax*, a copy of which no doubt lodged in Miss Patchett's library. Emily could feel the sorrow of the break-up of the ancient Sunderland family, in 1865 exiled from their ancestral home by the exigencies of the Civil War.<sup>1</sup>

Emily responded to anything sad, with an understanding bred of kinship. But did she respond quickly, this summer her disillusionment was fresh, to the mirth of young people?

<sup>1</sup> Simpson, 61-75; private research.

For eighty girls and young ladies cannot be gathered together (when religion is not used against them like a bludgeon, as at Cowan Bridge) without a display of rollicking spirits. One form of recreation at Law Hill was horse-back riding—the old stone mounting-block in the courtyard still may be seen. But it is improbable that Emily rode; for one thing, she had no money for lessons. But there is joy in watching the grace of a horse and rider, and that joy, as a natural reaction from her habitual melancholy, she often experienced. The heart refuses to suffer continuously; a pitiful truant, it must occasionally rejoice, in order to get breath and strength for suffering again.

Because an interval offers no biographical poems to explain it does not necessarily mean that none were written; for some may have been destroyed, by Emily herself or by Charlotte, or by the efficient ravages of nearly a hundred years. Such an interval is the greater part of the summer of 1838.

In October Emily wrote a poem which may be exclusively Gondal; but which may commemorate her having seen someone who reminded her of her love. If the latter, she wondered if her love had ever had a similar experience:

Where were ye all? And where wert thou?  
I saw an eye that shone like thine;  
But dark curls waved around his brow,  
And his stern glance was strange to mine.

And yet a dream-like comfort came  
Into my heart and anxious eye;  
And, trembling yet to hear his name,  
I bent to listen watchfully.

This voice, though never heard before,  
Still spoke to me of years gone by:  
It seems a vision to restore,  
That brought the hot tears to my eye.

Of course Emily's computations of time can never be taken seriously.

Her next poem is another argument that she was still at Law Hill for it applies to the academy far better than the Parsonage:

I paused on the threshold, I turned to the sky;  
I looked to the heaven and the dark mountains round;

The full moon sailed bright through that ocean on high,  
And the wind murmured past with a wild eerie sound.  
And I entered the walls of my dark prison-house:  
Mysterious it rose from the billowy moor . . .

This was followed by a pathetic quatrain. In her isolation of spirit, the human Emily imagined not an old song, really, but her lost love saying:

Oh, come with me: thus ran the song;  
The moon is bright in Autumn's sky;  
And thou hast toiled and laboured long,  
With aching head and weary eye.

Verses like this were apparently dashed off without much thought, since not followed up and elaborated. They sprang from her heart spontaneously.

The more she wrote about her lost love, the more she wrote. The emotion and the relief of expressing it were cumulative.

But if the meanings of some of her poems are sometimes obscure, on October 17 she wrote a poem blindingly clear. Without equivocation it tells all about her love affair, saying in effect that her black-eyed love parted from her in violation of a vow of fidelity made on a wild hillside, and that though she pleads now she will never plead again, being, in her pride, determined to find comfort henceforth in her family alone. It is headed "J. Brenzaida to A. S.," but this doubtless means no more than that she twisted the Gondal legend so as to contain this new emotion of her own:

I knew not 'twas so dire a crime  
To say the word, Adieu—  
But this shall be the only time  
My slighted heart shall sue.

The wild hillside, the winter morn,  
The gnarled and ancient tree,  
If in your breast they waken scorn,  
Shall wake the same in me.

I can forget black eyes and brows,  
And lips of falsest charm,  
If you forget the sacred vows  
Those faithless lips could form.

If hard commands can tame your love,  
Or strongest walls can hold,  
I would not wish to grieve above  
A thing so false and cold.

And there are bosoms bound to mine  
 With links both tried and strong;  
 And there are eyes whose lightning shine  
 Has warmed and blest me long:

Those eyes shall make my only day,  
 Shall set my spirit free,  
 And chase the foolish thoughts away  
 That mourn your memory.

The outstanding questions are, *what* commands, and who gave them?—but such questions must be held in reserve.

Her next poem, written November 1, is desperate and mighty; for sheer driving-power of bitterness unexcelled in the English language; and, as autobiography, a diamond-mine. For nearly a year she had brooded on a tragic rebuff, as a boiling liquid rumbles and steam gathers in a covered vessel, and this poem is a sudden savage blowing off of the lid. It mingles, till they are scarcely distinguishable, love and hate. It is defiance, vengeance, supplication, triumph. It is utter and exquisite despair. It is a statement of intended suicide, never carried out, but none the less longed for. It is Emily naked—and must be quoted complete:

Light up thy halls! 'Tis closing day;  
 I'm drear and lone and far away:  
 Cold blows on my breast the north-wind's bitter sigh,  
 And, oh! my couch is bleak, beneath the rainy sky.

Light up thy halls! Think not of me;  
 Absent is that face which thou hast hated so to see;  
 Bright be thine eyes, undimmed their dazzling shine,  
 For never, never more shall they encounter mine.

The desert moor is dark; there is tempest in the air;  
 I have breathed my only wish in one last, one burning prayer;  
 A prayer that would come forth although it lingered long;  
 That set on fire my heart, but froze upon my tongue.

And now, it shall be done before the morning rise:  
 I will not watch the sun appear in yonder skies.  
 One task alone remains: thy pictured face to view;  
 And then I go to prove if God, at least, be true!

Do I not see thee now? Thy black resplendent hair;  
 Thy glory-beaming brow; and smile, how heavenly fair!  
 Thine eyes are turned away—those eyes I would not see:  
 Their dark, their deadly ray, would more than madden me.

Then, go, deceiver, go!—My hand is streaming wet;  
 My heart's blood flows to buy the blessing—to forget!  
 Oh! could that heart give back, give back again to thine,  
 One tenth part of the pain that clouds my dark decline!

Oh! could I see thy lids weighed down in cheerless woe;  
Too full to hide their tears; too stern to overflow;  
Oh! could I know thy soul with equal grief was torn,  
This fate might be endured, this anguish might be borne.

How gloomy grows the night! 'Tis Gondal's wind that blows;  
I shall not tread again the deep glens where it rose.  
I feel it on my face: 'Where, wild blast, dost thou roam?  
What do we, wanderer, here, so far away from home?

'I do not need thy breath to cool my death-cold brow;  
But go to that far land, where *she* is shining now;  
Tell her my latest wish, tell her my dreary doom;  
Say that *my* pangs are past, but *hers* are yet to come.'

Vain words, vain frenzied thoughts! No ear can hear my call:  
Lost in the desert air my frantic curses fall;  
And could *she* see me now, perchance her lip would smile,  
Would smile in careless pride and utter scorn the while!

And yet for all her hate, each parting glance would tell  
A stronger passion breathed, burned in this last farewell;  
Unconquered in my soul the Tyrant rules me still;  
*Life* bows to my control, but *Love* I cannot kill!

Could any writing, prose or poetry, be plainer? Here is no holding back, no unconscious or deliberate obscuring. The fierceness of the accent proves autobiography; for no one could assume the degree of that feeling and keep it true-sounding. Earlier poems, in 1838, had delicately hinted at a personal tragedy; this boldly states and openly dramatizes. The candour is so patent that one can pick out biographical details without fear that they are spurious. Emily was not in a mood for dissembling, even for purposes of art. She was in the death-bed frame of mind which utters the truth for the beautiful sake of truth, without apology, or veiling, or attempt to gain favours by propitiation—for what were favours now? The facts here referred to are not different from the facts referred to in several previous poems; they are identical—except that she goes further and reveals more.

She is speaking directly to someone she has passionately loved, and cannot help still loving, though deceived. She broods on suicide, finding acid satisfaction in imagining the details of stabbing and anticipating its effect upon her love, its cause. Love rankles to hate, yet remains love. This was no ordinary "affair."

This poem seems to show that Emily was at Law Hill



("What do we . . . here, so far away from home?"); that she believed herself hated ("absent is that face which thou hast hated so to see") though loved too ("But yet . . . each parting glance would tell a stronger passion breathed"); and that her beloved was not as poor as herself ("Light up thy halls!"), was now separated from her by considerable distance ("I'm drear and lone and far away"), was possessed of some beauty ("Bright be thine eyes, undimmed their dazzling shine" and "Thy black resplendent hair; thy glory-beaming brow; and smile how heavenly fair!"), and was spirited rather than humble in bearing or shy (witness: "Would smile in careless pride and utter scorn . . ."). "Go, deceiver, go!" Again it is treachery she complains of, a treachery which at last she has the courage fully to denounce. The blackest curse issues from her mouth; she has no compassion—why should she wish for a setting-aside of the moral order? You suffer as I have suffered! she cries. But the curse is weakened by her confession that love has been, and is, and therefore presumably always will be, ineradicable in her heart. It is a splendid poem for all the wild extremity of feeling. It avoids hysteria by being as grounded and sincere as it is intense.

"Treachery" (to repeat) doubtless meant nothing more lurid than a changing of the mind after a tacit or outright confession of love. Emily's code had been formulated in the fastness of her own soul, and in keeping with her nature was strict, admitting no compromise.

The terrific emotions preceding and following the composition of this poem exhausted her. In her trouble she turned instinctively to the memory and symbol of Maria for comfort:

O dream! where art thou now?  
 Long years have passed away,  
 Since last from off thy angel-brow  
 I saw the light decay.

Alas! alas, for me!  
 Thou wert so bright and fair,  
 I could not think thy memory  
 Would yield me nought but care!

The sunbeam and the storm,  
 The summer eve divine,  
 The silent night of solemn calm,  
 The full moon's cloudless shine,

Were once entwined with thee;  
But now, with weary pain,  
Lost vision! 'tis enough for me  
Thou canst not shine again.<sup>1</sup>

Then, eased a little in spite of herself, she wrote and signed E. J. B. a sad and at times very lovely poem in which fervent love of the moors becomes articulate in appropriate language:

Loud without the wind was roaring  
Through the waned autumnal sky,  
Drenching wet, the cold rain pouring  
Spoke of stormy winters nigh.

All too like that dreary eye  
Sighed within repining grief—  
Sighed at first—but sighed not long,  
Sweet—How softly sweet it came!  
Wild words of an ancient song,  
Undefined, without a name.

“It was spring, for the skylark was singing.”  
Those words they awakened a spell;  
They unlocked a deep fountain whose springing  
Nor absence nor distance can quell.

Awaken on all my dear moorlands  
The wind in its glory and pride!  
O call me from valleys and highlands  
To walk by the hill-river's side!

It is swelled with the first snowy weather;  
The rocks they are icy and hoar,  
And darker waves round the long heather,  
And the fern-leaves are sunny no more.

There are no yellow-stars on the mountains;  
The blue-bells have long died away  
From the brink of the moss-bedded fountain,  
From the side of the wintery brae—

But lovelier than cornfields all waving  
In emerald and scarlet and gold  
Are the slopes where the north-wind is raving,  
And the glens where I wandered of old.

“It was morning, the bright sun was beaming.”  
How sweetly that brought back to me  
The time when nor labour nor dreaming  
Broke the sleep of the happy and free.

<sup>1</sup> November 5, 1838.

Happy no longer, in the mind free no longer! The poem continues:

But blithely we rose as the dusk heaven  
Was melting to amber and blue,  
And swift were the wings to our feet given  
While we traversed the meadows of dew.

For the moors, for the moors, where the short grass  
Like velvet beneath us should lie!  
For the moors, for the moors, where each high pass  
Rose sunny against the clear sky!

For the moors, where the linnet was trilling  
Its song on the old granite stone—  
Where the lark, the wild sky-lark was filling  
Every breast with delight like its own.

What language can utter the feeling  
That rose when, in exile afar,  
On the brow of a lonely hill kneeling  
I saw the brown heath growing there.

It was scattered and stunted, and told me  
That soon even that would be gone.  
It whispered, 'The grim walls enfold me  
I have bloomed in my last summer's sun.'

But not the loved music, whose waking  
Makes the soul of the Swiss die away,  
Has a spell more adored and heart-breaking  
Than in its half-blighted bells lay.

That spirit that bent 'neath its power,  
How it longed, how it burned to be free!  
If I could have wept in that hour  
Those tears had been heaven to me.

Well, well, the sad minutes are moving  
Though loaded with trouble and pain,  
And sometime the loved and the loving  
Shall meet on the mountains again!<sup>1</sup>

"The loved and the loving." She was "the loving." Contemplation of nature has softened her: love is again in ascendancy over hate. How striking, how darkly felicitous the first line of the poem: "Loud without the wind was roaring"! There is peculiar sadness in remembering the happiness of summer, in winter. And the last verse is piercing: "Well, well, the sad minutes are moving. . . ." Only one who has suffered can fully savour bliss. And only one passionately devoted to nature could have made the

<sup>1</sup> November 11, 1838.

loving observations which crowd this poem. "For the moors, for the moors" is pure delirium, interpreting the hundreds of times she had run wild through the heather. But the end of summer meant more to her, now, than the end of summer. It was heavy with the significance of a larger order. "If I could have wept in that hour. . . " Emily never could weep: she lived and she died.

Another November poem, of this same 1838, is Gondal so bent to her own purposes it is no longer Gondal: a battle, symbolic of her own fierce struggle: a defeat which in one mood she felt had happened to her, or must happen:

There swept adown that dreary glen  
A wilder sound than mountain wind—  
The thrilling shouts of fighting men,  
With something sadder far behind.

The thrilling shouts they died away  
Before the night came greyly down;  
But closed not with the closing day  
The choking sob, the tortured moan.

Down in a hollow, sunk in shade,  
Where dark forms waved in secret gloom,  
A ruined, bleeding form was laid,  
Waiting the death that was to come.

"Down in a hollow, sunk in shade"—ah, that was where she was this autumn. How much more merciful to the "ruined, bleeding form" if it were quickly and definitely dead. But it is not thus that the soul grows; and the moral order must be served.

Christmas holidays were drawing near again, but as yet Emily went home only in imagination. Her pupils were noisy and sometimes annoying, and she was glad to escape for a space. In a poem written December 4 she describes the Parsonage and its surroundings exactly, each detail recognizable. This poem alone should confound those who contend that Emily was at Law Hill only six months. It is December, 1838, and she has been teaching at Law Hill a year and four months:

A little while, a little while,  
The noisy crowd are barred away;  
And I can sing and I can smile—  
A little while I've holiday!

Where wilt thou go, my harassed heart?  
Full many a land invites thee now;  
And places near, and far apart  
Have rest for thee, my weary brow—

There is a spot mid barren hills,  
Where winter howls and driving rain,  
But if the dreary tempest chills,  
There is a light that warms again.

The house is old, the trees are bare,  
And moonless bends the misty dome,  
And what on earth is half so dear—  
So longed for as the hearth of home?

The mute bird sitting on the stone,  
The dank moss dripping from the wall,  
The garden-walk with weeds o'er-grown,  
I love them—how I love them all!

Shall I go there? or shall I seek  
Another clime, another sky,  
Where tongues familiar music speak  
In accents dear t'memory?

Yes, as I mused, the naked room,  
The flickering firelight died away,  
And from the midst of cheerless gloom  
I passed to bright, unclouded day.

A little and a lone green lane,  
That opened on a common wide;  
A distant, dreamy, dim blue chain  
Of mountains circling every side;

A heaven so clear, an earth so calm,  
So sweet, so soft, so hushed an air;  
And, deepening still the dream-like charm,  
Wild moor-sheep feeding everywhere.

That was the scene—I knew it well;  
I knew the path-ways far and near,  
That, winding o'er each billowy swell,  
Marked out the tracks of wandering deer.

Could I have lingered but an hour,  
It well had paid a week of toil;  
But truth has banished fancy's power,  
I hear my dungeon bars recoil.

Even as I stood with raptured eye,  
Absorbed in bliss so deep and dear,  
My hour of rest had fled by,  
And given me back to weary care.<sup>1</sup>

How rich in specific information! Emily had a daily rest hour, an afternoon recess; perhaps Miss Patchett's kind concession because, in the beginning, much work had tired her. She went to her sparsely-furnished room,

<sup>1</sup> December 4, 1838.

locked the door, and sat by an open fireplace (if the fire-light had been cased in a stove its flickering would have been invisible) and surrendered to fancy. Her memory could call up any known scene—it was just a question of which she preferred to-day. The picture of home was sweetest: the old house; the bare trees; the weedy garden-walk; the “little and the lone green lane” that led back from the house, along a stone wall, through iron turnstiles, to the moors; the distant range of mountains; the moor-sheep feeding. Here, as always, she refers to Law Hill as a dungeon, though perhaps in the sense of confinement and routine, only—not ugliness and horror. She was passionately attached to home. That question, if it ever existed, is here settled. Nothing in the last year and a half had alienated her from home. Also, the question of whether or not she wrote “Light Up Thy Halls!” to anyone connected with the Parsonage—if *that* question ever existed—is here rendered absurd. To no one at the Parsonage could she possibly have said: “Absent is that face which thou hast hated so to see,” or “For never, never more shall their eyes encounter mine!” or “Go, deceiver, go!” Of the Parsonage and what it connoted she cried, “I love them—how I love them all!”

Yet, in spite of everything, it is right to reiterate that Law Hill had its pleasant aspects, to which Emily could not have been insensible. A poem written December 7 is proof:

How still, how happy! These are words  
That once would scarce agree together;  
I loved the plashing of the surge,  
The changing heaven, the breezy weather,

More than smooth seas and cloudless skies,  
And solemn, soothing, softened airs,  
That in the forest woke no sighs,  
And from the green spray shook no tears.

How still, how happy! Now I feel  
Where silence dwells is sweeter far  
Than laughing mirth's most joyous swell,  
However pure its raptures are.

Come, sit down on this sunny stone;  
'Tis wintry light o'er flowerless moors—  
But sit—for we are all alone,  
And clear expand heaven's breathless shores.

I could think, in the withered grass  
 Spring's budding wreathes we might discern;  
 The violet's eye might shyly flash,  
 And young leaves shoot among the fern.

It is but thought—full many a night  
 The snow shall clothe those hills afar,  
 And storms shall add a drearier blight,  
 And winds shall wage a wilder war,

Before the lark may herald in  
 Fresh foliage, twined with blossoms fair,  
 And summer days again begin  
 Their glory-haloed crown to wear.

Yet my heart loves December's smile  
 As much as July's golden beam:  
 Then let me sit and watch the while  
 The blue ice curdling on the stream.<sup>1</sup>

The sunny stone on which she sat was a Southowram stone, and the stream on which the blue ice curdled (how fine and apt that image!) a Southowram stream. Who else did "we" include? Probably one of the other teachers, for there must have been a number: Cowan Bridge, with about the same registration (eighty or ninety pupils) and less well organized, had eight teachers and two assistants.<sup>2</sup> There is no indication that the other person was anything more intimate than an hour's companion who, like Emily, enjoyed a walk in the open.

Nature was balm to Emily's lacerated heart, and again and again she went to it for healing. "The Bluebell," dated December 18, was no actual flower examined and described; it bloomed only in faithful memory, nurtured by the love which deprivation increases:

The bluebell is the sweetest flower  
 That waves in summer air:  
 Its blossoms have the mightiest power  
 To soothe my spirit's care.

There is a spell in purple heath  
 Too wildly, sadly dear;  
 The violet has a fragrant breath,  
 But fragrance will not cheer.

The trees are bare, the sun is cold,  
 And seldom, seldom seen;  
 The heavens have lost their zone of gold,  
 The earth, its robe of green;

<sup>1</sup> December 7, 1838.

<sup>2</sup> Robinson, 41.

And ice upon the glancing stream  
 Has cast its sombre shade;  
 And distant hills and valleys seem  
 In frozen mist arrayed.

. . . . .

But though I mourn the heather-bell  
 'Tis better far, away;  
 I know how fast my tears would swell  
 To see its smile to-day.

And that wood flower that hides so shy  
 Beneath the mossy stone,  
 Its balmy scent and dewy eye,  
 'Tis not for them I moan.

It is the slight and stately stem,  
 The blossoms silvery blue,  
 The buds hid like a sapphire gem,  
 Trim sheathes of emerald hue.

. . . . .

For these I weep, so long divided  
 Through winter's dreary day,  
 In longing weep—but most when guided  
 On withered banks to stray.

If chilly, then, the light should fall  
 Adown the dreary sky,  
 And gild the dank and darkened wall  
 With transient brilliancy,

How do I yearn, how do I pine  
 For the time of flowers to come,  
 And turn me from that fading shine  
 To mourn the fields of home!<sup>1</sup>

This, as a poem, is good only in spots; but as a record of taste and predilection, biographically interesting. She describes the bluebell as if it were present before her eyes instead of withered and gone three months. When Emily really knew and loved something, how penetrating her scrutiny! The last two stanzas have the unanalyzable magic of her best poetry; they are replete with homesickness; the tone and meaning fuse.

The last line indicates that Emily, on December 18, was still at Law Hill; but in a day or two she must have gone home for the Christmas holidays.

Thus, on a note of delicate nostalgia the year 1838, so important in Emily's development, came to an end. Love

<sup>1</sup> December 18, 1838.



like a bright sun had risen for her, and then among shadows set. She had been comforted for a time by mysticism and, somewhat, by poetry. In art she no longer groped; she was sure; at her best she was strong with an easy strength; scornful of sentimentality. And in a measure she had been comforted by nature, which whispers that man's personal troubles are more trivial than they appear. Yet all reassurances were shallow. On a deep level her heart remained convinced of its sorrow. For it was the sorrow of an idealistic person disillusioned, of a proud person rejected.

## XX

### HYPOTHESIS

WHEN there is a nettle to grasp, better to grasp it firmly.

We are come to a question with prickles like a nettle. It cannot be avoided because it arises naturally and inevitably from a study of Emily Brontë's life up to this point, her twenty-first year. Fifty years, ten years, ago, it could not have been discussed without arousing prejudices; would have seemed to insult Emily merely by being asked, whatever the answer. To-day it is not so. We understand that all sorts of twists are possible to human beings, and no one is attached; that more often than not deflections from the norm are congenital.

The question is: Was Emily a member of that beset band of women who can find their pleasure only in women? It is a large band; larger than would appear from a rapid survey, since such inclination is a matter so private it is usually kept secret during a woman's life-time, and after her death—if she is not too obscure for anyone to take an interest in her intimate peculiarities—no record exists, and friends will not talk. Through the history of the world the subject has been more or less anathema, though it is known that some of the most brilliant women of all times have leaned left, so to speak, sexually—beginning, says legend, with the immortal Sappho. But in modern times, hidden things are aired; anything less than a direct and frank approach is deplored; we do not drag the subject in (that would be indefensible), but when it presents itself for consideration, we do not try to dodge it (that would be cowardly): we try to have a large human comprehension.

To blame and censure women with this cast to their emotions would be absurd. It would be like blaming and censuring them for having red hair, or cowlicks, or double joints, or high-bridged noses. And it would be blaming and censuring some of the finest women-writers of to-day, women of character and unimpugnable spirituality: to name only one example, Charlotte Mew, whose poetry is beginning to be recognized for what it is, an accomplishment of the first order. No reader of it can doubt the exquisite sensitivity, the fine-grainedness of her being. But Charlotte Mew was passionately attached to her mother and sister; and then passionately attached to another

woman. She could not fall in love with a man; it was not in her. But the world calls the propensities of the majority normal, sweet and full of light, and the propensities of the minority by an ill-sounding name. Her voice, manner, taste in clothes, walk, and physical appearance, though she was small and delicate, hinted faintly of masculinity. She could not change. She did not know what to do about the instincts in her. She was half appalled, half loyal to them. At last she drank a bottleful of lysol in a London nursing-home. Her case is mentioned here only because it is similar to thousands of cases, especially among artists, for artists more than other people are thus—we will not say afflicted—limited. The point is, theory must not be so small and ungenerous as to exclude from the pale Charlotte Mew and women like her. It is not, among intelligent people. We are not prudes any more; and the tormented ones are braver. They begin to act without subterfuge and to speak without apology. They say, virtually: "This is central to my nature; if you wish to understand me, you had best know the whole; look!"

This is not to classify Emily Brontë before we have examined her special case. It is merely to declare that we do not insult her by asking whether she belongs with this unconforming, pitiable coterie or not; and to declare that if by any chance she does, Emily is not altered; she was and is Emily. Esteeming her, we are bound to esteem the ingredients of her nature; we must be thankful for all her impulses. If they had been otherwise, she would have been otherwise, and so her writing, otherwise, if she had written at all—a terrible and instructive thought.

What reasons are there, then, for asking the question? First, the masculinity of the impression of her presence. Second, her pronounced preference for male rôles and pseudonyms. Third, her dislike of men. Fourth, her intense feeling for Maria, then Anne, then someone who, there are strong reasons to believe, was female. Fifth, direct evidence in "Light Up Thy Halls" and other poems. Sixth, indirect evidence in *Wuthering Heights*, not only because of its contents, but because of the unconceding masculinity of her prose style. An examination of the last reason must be postponed; an examination of the other reasons can be only partial at this stage of her story. Emily has given us no specific permission to "look," being beyond such matters. But surely a hundred years give permission. And regardless

of the verdict, I will be able to say, paraphrasing what Rossetti said of Shelley while writing his biography: "I feel not at all ashamed of Emily Brontë. She asks for no suppressions, she needs none. . . . After everything has been stated, we find that the woman Emily Brontë was worthy to be the poet Emily Brontë, and praise cannot reach higher than that."

We will take the points up one by one.

Those who knew Emily constantly used words of masculine connotation to describe her. Charlotte said she was "stronger than a man."<sup>1</sup> She made Shirley, Emily's avowed prototype, like a "young squire," and, again, like a "cavalier." Monsieur Héger the astute professor of later years, gave it as his opinion that "she should have been a man."<sup>2</sup> Haworth villagers said that she "was more like a boy than a girl,"<sup>3</sup> and that her figure looked "loose and boyish when she slouched over the moors, whistling to her dogs, and taking long strides."<sup>4</sup> A girl who had done temporary work at the Parsonage told Miss Mary Robinson that Miss Emily was "sometimes quite jovial, like a boy";<sup>5</sup> and another servant added that she was "so genial and kind" (when Martha Brown's ailing cousin visited the kitchen she brought out her own chair); but "a little masculine."<sup>6</sup> And according to Mrs. Ratcliffe, Martha Brown's sister, "She was that wilful-like she would wait on herself. . . . She'd bigger bones" than the others "and was stronger-looking, and more masculine."<sup>7</sup> Secondary sources are of less importance than primary, but they are not to be ignored. May Sinclair, sensitive to the impact of Emily's personality through the medium of Emily's writings, describes her physically and mentally as "virile"—an adjective directly derived from the Latin *vir*, meaning man; Emily tramped the moors "with the form and the step of a virile adolescent"; Emily had a "virile tolerance."<sup>8</sup> Romer Wilson says of Emily: "Did the lonely father see himself in her and feel that she was the only other male spirit in his house? . . . She early knew the boy in herself, and later knew the man. Others knew it too."<sup>9</sup> Reviewers suspected immediately that Charlotte was a woman, simply by the way she put words together; but Emily was "a man of

<sup>1</sup> Biographical Notice.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, 122.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>4</sup> Sinclair, 194, 195.

<sup>5</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 273.

<sup>6</sup> Robinson, 65.

<sup>7</sup> *The Cornhill*, July, 1910.

<sup>8</sup> Wilson, 35.

uncommon talents." As for Emily's looks, they must have carried to the beholder a faint masculine impression, for Charlotte was reminded of Emily's face not by any woman's she ever saw but by a man's—by G. H. Lewes'. "Lewes' face almost moves me to tears," she wrote after Emily was no more, "it is so wonderfully like Emily."<sup>1</sup>

Her nickname in the family, as we have seen, was "the Major," as her prototype Shirley's was "the Captain." In the Gondal games, in contrast to the feminine rôles which Anne chose, she preferred masculine ones; her self-identification with men was not awkward or perfunctory, as in the case of Anne, but spontaneous and complete; she was A. G. Alaisda, Fernando, Edward, E. L. Gleneden, Douglas, F. De Samars, Roderic, and sundry other imaginary males, with Julius Angora, otherwise Julius Brenzaida, the King, her favourite. It may be argued that Charlotte who, no one has ever doubted, was feminine through and through, in her youth identified herself with the Duke of Wellington, and that even Anne on rare occasions masqueraded under a man's name. But it is the uniformity and unflaggingness of Emily's preference for things male that is the point and gives pause. When the three sisters came to adopt three male-sounding pseudonyms, Charlotte and Anne were glad to relinquish theirs; Emily clung tenaciously to hers, to the end.

With one exception, and that perhaps significant (which will be noted later), Emily disliked men outside of her family, whether curates, teachers, or just neighbours. Temporary maids at the Parsonage have related that if the butcher's boy or baker's man knocked on the kitchen door she fled to the front hall or parlour, to wait apprehensively till she heard their hob-nailed shoes clumping down the path.<sup>2</sup> In later years she was at odds with Monsieur Héger; "Emily and he," Charlotte wrote Ellen Nussey, "don't draw well together at all."<sup>3</sup> Still later, when curates poked their heads into Mr. Brontë's study in search of the parson and encountered Emily, they beat such a precipitous retreat, knowing how little love she wasted on men, it became a stock joke at the Parsonage.<sup>4</sup> Four men proposed to Charlotte, who was far less handsome and dynamic of personality; but there is no record of a proposal to Emily. Did men sense something in her which held them back?

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 285, 286.

<sup>2</sup> Robinson, 142.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 261.

<sup>4</sup> Robinson, 72.

Did she have no need of them—she whose tremendous needs molested her terribly, like the wolf which tore out the entrails of the Spartan boy clasping it under his cloak? Of her tears she said:

They deluge my heart, like the rain  
On cursed Gomorrah's howling plain.

Her needs were never fully satisfied. But they were partially satisfied by the females she adored—by Maria who stood in place of her mother; by mild Anne with whom she was often seen “twined together as united statues of power and humility,” for they were “like twins, inseparable companions, and in the very closest sympathy, which never had any interruption.”<sup>1</sup> and—it is a question—by the girl or young woman she addresses in “Light Up Thy Halls”?

For there are reasons to believe it was a girl or young woman, and not a man, who possessed her imagination completely after she went to Law Hill; whom she loved, and was repulsed by, and lost, and hated, and continued in spite of reason and outrage and humiliation to love. It is true that all the Brontë progeny switched genders in their work according to whim: Charlotte did it, Branwell did it, Anne did it: when they meant “he” they occasionally camouflaged with “she”—and vice versa. If Emily had done it in the same way and degree, nothing of biography could be deduced. But when Emily says “she” in “Light Up Thy Halls,” one feels she means “she.” Why? Because of the intensity, the immediacy, the fearful urgency of the whole poem. In that mood could she have played and dissembled, even with pronouns? One instinctively answers No; instinctively believes that the emotion behind the poem was *bona fide* else she could not have expressed it so marvellously well. Of course this cannot be proved as it can be proved that the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the squares of the other two sides of a triangle. But such things can be proved in another way to a penetrating and intuitive mind. Certainly all that had been pent up in her so long seems to come out in a mighty rush. The poem establishes its own complete and strict authenticity to anyone sensitive and sane. For it is emotion at white heat. Emily dead cries to the wild blast,

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 112.

I do not need thy breath to cool my death-cold brow;  
 But go to that far land, where *she* is shining now;  
 Tell her my latest wish, tell her my dreary doom;  
 Say that *my* pangs are past, but *hers* are yet to come.

Has this the accent of passion assumed, or the air of having been tinkered with and "fixed up"? The italics are Emily's. "And could she see me now, perchance her lip would smile. . . ." Ah, this confession—if confession it is—does not admit of narrow bigoted theories; it is sheer tragedy, if ever there was tragedy. "And yet for all her hate . . ." Emily continues. One is almost afraid to peer into this human heart, it is so sad. One is tempted, in order to escape vicarious pain, to turn away from what seems a magnificent, harsh revelation. . . . With little risk of being unwittingly misled, then, and with almost as much assurance as if Emily had written a note in black and white to the effect that when she says "she" it is genuine, we may put it down as all but certain that "Light Up Thy Halls" was written to a girl or woman.

Does this probability, in conjunction with testimony of a somewhat masculine personality, prove that Emily was a member of that strange band, that sorrowful and fugitive minority? No. But it is powerful circumstantial evidence.<sup>1</sup> It is sufficient to compel us to shape an hypothesis and to test it by seeing whether or not it "fits," whether or not it "works," whether or not it is plausible motivation for some of the mysterious things in Emily's life and writings. Lawyers proceed so; scientists proceed so. It is the only way we can pass from what is given to what is not given, from what is obvious to what is implicit and subtle and half or wholly concealed, though not a whit less true. But we must go carefully, with minds open; we must go reverently. We probe a human heart, and one of the noblest.

And we must remember one very important point, as we look back over Emily's past and forward over her future, and feel our way toward a conception of her deep character. If Emily had this peculiarity (peculiarity in the sense that it is contrary to the inclinations and habits of the majority, and if made general and carried to its logical conclusion would depopulate the world)—if Emily had this

<sup>1</sup> "Circumstantial evidence is the proof of various facts or circumstances which usually attend the main facts in disputes, and therefore tend to prove its existence or to sustain by their consistency the hypothesis claimed. It is reasoning from facts which are known or proved to exist, to establish such as are conjectured to exist." (*Black's Law Dictionary*.)

peculiarity, she might have been (indeed, in view of the isolation of her days, the limitation of her reading, and the secrecy maintained by Victorians on all such subjects, *most certainly was*) entirely unconscious of its nature, its extent in herself and through the ages, its import and implications, its physical possibilities, its very name.<sup>1</sup> She would have felt it as merely an odd tendency in a direction opposite to most people's; as a vague discord with the world; as sad, undefined and unsatisfied longings; as a grudge against nature for not making her a boy. She would have been oblivious of it at first, and then gradually aware and questioning, and then profoundly confused and troubled. And then, conceivably, she might have been led into an impossible and tragic situation, simply because like all honest persons she believed in her own emotions and followed them out to their last results; perfectly innocent, obeying an unnamed urge for which she was not responsible, being born so, as some filberts grow double instead of single, and some clovers have four instead of the usual three leaves.

Very well. Assuming for the purpose of argument that Emily Brontë was predisposed toward her own sex, what that has been obscure in her life does this hypothesis explain and make clear?

Almost everything; and especially her emotional attachments. Psychology says that, when not physically caused, such a predilection is in most cases mentally fixed by the early adoration of a parent or one who takes the place of a parent. In Emily's case this would have been Maria, the one who mothered her when she passionately needed a mother; who, because gentle and sympathetic and wise, came to seem all-good. When Maria died Emily would have instinctively searched for another as nearly like Maria as possible—and in default of others settled on Anne, a sort of diminished Maria. But, as she grew older, she would have wanted, without knowing exactly why, to love and to be loved by someone not her sister, someone more nearly matched to her own mental and spiritual stature. When she found that person she would have been radiant with joy; would have given her whole self, and, judging the other by her own ardour and fidelity, expected all in return. If the chosen one suffered a change of heart, perhaps because

<sup>1</sup> Charlotte possessed a book called *The Doctrine of the Passions Explained and Improved . . . with an account of their names, nature, appearances, effects and different uses in human life*, but it did not cover *this*.



feeling guilty over an episode which had seemed natural and lovely as it passed between them but which changed significance in retrospect, Emily would have felt betrayed; outraged not so much by what had been done against her (she was proud, but not conceited) as by what had been done against their love, to which she was loyal. Then, sensing the other's shame, she might have begun to take on the world's viewpoint a little and feel shame too—and that, to her, would have been equal to death. So she would have desired actual death, as the only means of forgetting. Then, life triumphing because of the natural human instinct of self-preservation, everything in her would have marshalled in defence, to vindicate herself and her way of love. But, self-vindicated, what would she have had? No peace because no love. In spite of the comfort of literature, and of nature, and of mysticism, an intolerable emptiness.

Is that what happened to Emily? Has the hypothesis thrown any beams of light?

The first part of the speculation is almost exactly what happened to Emily up to her twenty-first year. We must therefore hold the hypothesis in reserve to see whether or not it applies thereafter. If it does, it will have assumed all but the authority of fact. Meanwhile we will say that, all things taken in conjunction, our question cannot be peremptorily dismissed.

"Charlotte said that Emily liked me," Ellen Nussey testified many years after Emily's death, "because I never *seemed* to mark her peculiarities, and I never pained her by treating her as a peculiar person."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 274.

## XXI

### RIVAL HYPOTHESIS LEANING HEAVILY ON THE GONDAL LEGEND AND LOUIS PARENSELL

I WILL now turn devil's advocate, and argue against the hypothesis I have set up—not from any *a priori* wish to prove or disprove the theory, but solely in the interests of truth. When the Vatican is considering a canonization it employs a lawyer to hunt desperately for every possible argument against that canonization. The Papal devil's advocate is more of a prosecutor; this one more of a defender.

And here it should be stressed that both the hypothesis of peculiarity and this counter-hypothesis are framed in the firm belief that if I did not advance them now they would be advanced later, by some other student of Emily's life, inevitably, since the facts of the case force both considerations. It is essential that the approach be unprejudiced and dispassionate if from the friction of ideas sparks of truth are to fly out.

But I cannot admit as an argument that Emily may have written in complete Gondal objectivity her turbulent love-poems and hate-poems. They bear within themselves too patent a proof of personal impulse and bias. If concrete proof is needed that she mixed Gondals and reality, it exists in "The Absent One," which deals not so much with the departure of "Arthur brother" as with the departure of Anne on that particular date; also in "North and South," which chronicles the homesickness of both the Unique Society stranded in Ulah far from Gondaland and of Charlotte, Branwell and Anne far from Haworth. No, the Gondal legend was vitalized into living material and continued to be a fit vehicle for Emily's imagination, through her marvellous maturity, up to her very death, only and precisely because it had come to be a vast symbolism for her internal conflicts: a vent for inwardness. Otherwise it would have passed with the passing of her childhood; would have become dead for her, as it became dead for Anne, who continued to play it but in a perfunctory way, growing most indifferent just when Emily grew most intense (1841-1844), and in her last years abandoning it altogether. Anne's best poems were never Gondal; Emily's often. Indeed the close Gondal collaboration between Emily

and Anne which has always been taken for granted by Brontë commentators did not really exist: Anne went one direction and Emily quite another. Their imaginary characters were all from Gondaland or Gaaldine, but Emily's set was entirely different from Anne's. The only person they refer to in common is Alexander E., and Emily's Alexander is either quite a different personage or takes quite a different course than Anne's Alexander. Nor is the argument that Emily in her strong poems nine times out of ten identified herself with men, whereas Anne with equally tenacious instinct with women, to be refuted. In only two poems does Anne speak as a man, and both are feeble than her wont, as if she could not even begin to imagine the content of a male mind; whereas she was Lady Geralda, Olivia Vernon, Solala Vernon, and her favourite incarnation, Alexandrina Zenobia, with comparative ease. (What her "book by Henry Sophona" was, we do not know.) Which proves that Emily's manipulation of plot and character was neither influenced by nor answerable to Anne, but made freely according to her own secret purposes.

Then can Emily's powerful cries to a woman, of love and guilt, like "Light Up Thy Halls," be explained so that the hypothesis of peculiarity is discountenanced?

Only if in writing those poems she made emotional but not sex identifications. On its face this seems improbable. But let us reconstruct the Gondal legend on the chance that it will bolster a tenuous defence.

It has been widely assumed that the extant clues to the Gondal legend were too fragmentary to admit of any real piecing together—only May Sinclair ever having attempted to discover the gist of the action. Her sound intuitions splendidly equipped her for this work, but unfortunately her brief summary of 1912 was side-tracked from the truth by Clement Shorter's inclusion, in his *Complete Poems of Emily Brontë*, 1910, of many Angrian poems by Charlotte and Branwell; so that Miss Sinclair involved the Angrian Percy and Mary with the Gondal Gleneden, and the Angrian Zamorna rode the Angrian horse Black Eagle straight into the wilds of Gondaland. Not till 1923 were these errors of attribution corrected; at which time it was discovered that the "Zamornah" in Emily's poem beginning "Far, far away is mirth withdrawn" was really "Gomorrah"—which put a different complexion on things! But May Sinclair was eminently right when she said of

Emily and the Gondals: "She *was* these people; she lived, indistinguishably and interchangeably, their tumultuous and passionate life. . . . It is she who fights and rides, who loves and hates, and suffers and defies."<sup>1</sup>

My method in attempting a new reconstruction of Emily's part of the cycle has been very simple. I subjoined under every Gondal place whatever facts relating to it I could glean; then put down every Gondal character's name or initials and carefully collected under each all available details of his or her history; then, wherever possible, related those bits; and by cross-references related the characters; with this result:

Gaaldine, a large newly-discovered island in the South Pacific, was divided into six kingdoms: Alexandria, Almedore, Elseraden, Zelona, Ula (or Ulah) governed by four sovereigns, and Zedora governed by a viceroy.<sup>2</sup> It is not known how many kingdoms comprised Gondaland, a large island in the North Pacific whose capital was Regina,<sup>2</sup> but its most important kingdom was Angora of the "crimson ensign" ruled over by Julius Angora (otherwise Julius Brenzaida). This King Julius sailed to Gaaldine and in a great battle captured Almedore of the "sea-green standard"; then, urged on by his own and his love Rosina Alcons' ambition, planned by conquering new territories to found an "empire." He took the city of Zalona, outnumbered, and weakened by famine; and the warm southern Kingdom of Ulah; and arrayed himself against Erina; and explored the interior of Gaaldine.<sup>3</sup> Then "King Julius left the South Country, his banners all bravely flying," to return to Elmor Hill and swear eternal union with the other Gondal monarchs. But, faithless, he was already plotting to subjugate the whole of Gondaland to himself: "he falsely clasped" the hand of Gerald a brother-monarch. The wars which followed disrupted the island, and apparently all the monarchs except Julius were killed. A woman was his downfall. Because of his passionate love for the beautiful Rosina (whom he seems to have brought from Gaaldine but to have been unable for some reason publicly to espouse) he forgot discretion and, visiting her in her retreat, stayed too long and lost an important battle. But for *her* ambition, he said, he would be flying

<sup>1</sup> Sinclair, 209.

<sup>2</sup> Anne's notations made in a geography in 1832. See pages 71, 72.

<sup>3</sup> Emily's Diary of 1834. See page 96.

with her friends to Gaaldine and safety; so she must have urged him to re-conquests. But the tide was against him now; and, even while she waited for another visit, she learned that he had "died beneath his palace dome" by the dagger of an avenger, who himself fell unavenged, their blood mingling on the marble floor. "And in the zenith of his fame both power and life departed." The Emperor Julius was buried in a "desert grave" among "northern mountains." Fifteen years later Rosina wrote him a heart-breaking love poem: "Cold in the earth, and the deep snow piled above thee. . . ."

That is the movement of the main plot, with the hero of which she consistently identified herself. King Julius' Wars (called the First Wars) she set herself to chronicle.<sup>1</sup> But there were minor characters and minor plots; and a history of Gondaland after the death of Julius.

The crown devolved upon Henry Angora, evidently the son of Julius, and the young heirs of the suppressed kingdoms; for "the young sovereigns and their brothers and sisters"—Ronald Macalgin, Juliet Augusteena, Rosabella Esmaldan, Ella and Julian Egremont, Catherine Navarre and Cordelia Fitzaphnold<sup>1</sup>—were at the "Palace of Instruction" getting educated when they were bottled up there and had to effect an escape to join the Royalists, "hard driven by the victorious Republicans."<sup>2</sup> For the people had risen, and "the Gondals were . . . in a sad state. The Republicans were uppermost, but the Royalists not quite overcome."<sup>2</sup> The necessity to choose one side or the other split many friends, and condemned many patriots to prison or exile. A. G. Alaisda was separated from his love Geraldine, who found herself, an "outcast mother," in a cave by a river, clasping a sleeping child; and from his friend Alexander E., "Lord of Elbë." Lord Alfred lost his "idol queen" to death. Someone sang a farewell to Alexandria. Harold hoped that, though he must die a captive's death, his people would be free again. F. Desmers languished in prison; E. L. Gleneden within dungeon walls grieved that his kindred were scattered and dead. A. G. Rochelle was rescued from her dungeon by Julian M. after hideous sufferings had bred in her a deep mysticism; but others were not so lucky. "Rosy Blanche"

<sup>1</sup> Emily's Diary of 1845. See page 304.

<sup>2</sup> Anne's Diary of 1845. See page 306.

of noble blood wandered in sunburned exile. Edward lay dying, and Roderic, of their wounds. Douglas, outlawed leader of the people, fled on horseback, pursued by those who meant to avenge "their sovereign's gore." Douglas was urged by Angelica to kill the royal Augusta, whom he loved and who loved him. Angelica said this would confuse the Royalists, but her real motive was to avenge herself on her beloved and false friend Augusta. Angelica is "haughty, cold, sullen," permanently embittered by Augusta's turning against her. Indeed Angelica and Augusta are the protagonists of "Light Up Thy Halls." Yet Angelica replies to the unspoken thought that such fierce feeling between women is peculiar:

Listen! I've known a burning heart,  
To which my own was given;  
Nay, not with passion; do not start:  
Our love was love from heaven.

My soul dwelt with her day and night:  
She was my all-sufficing light . . .

Have we, then, in trying to disprove the hypothesis of peculiarity only re-inforced it? All in all, I think not. For though Emily's depiction of a life-and-death intensity of feeling between two women seems to argue in favour of that sorrowful hypothesis, something else has been established which tends to disprove it—a certain ubiquity of emotion which may have enabled her, so long as the *general* theme had some deep connection with her life, to imagine particularities belonging solely to the Gondals. In other words, the Gondals as Gondals were somewhat important to her. Is this the loophole through which we may escape from the hypothesis of peculiarity? If so (remembering that she was faithful to the Gondals because they gave her allegorical opportunities) it is a small loophole and we must squeeze.

Strong women with a certain forthrightness of speech and action are not *necessarily* masculine in their innermost nature; just as conversely men with a feminine cast to their personalities are not *necessarily* female in their sex reactions: a truth to be illustrated, later, by the Rev. William Weightman, whose manner gave a feminine impression but who was not predisposed to his own sex—quite the contrary, was deeply enamoured of girls.

So Emily was in love with a definite person; but we have

found a way, though difficult, to believe that perhaps, in spite of all contrary evidence, it was a man, after all, whom she loved.

Louis Parensell?

To explain that name I must describe the Smith Manuscript—so called by me because it was in the hands of George Smith and his family some eighty years.

It is a little four-by-six notebook with dark red covers which contains forty-three poems in Emily's autograph; really forty-six, since one of them Charlotte divided into "Heavy Hangs the Rain Drop" and "Child of Delight," another contains both "The Prisoner" and the first three verses of "The Visionary," and still another both "Why ask to know the date, the clime?" and "It was the autumn of the year." Whether Charlotte or Mr. Nicholls gave it to George Smith after Emily's death matters not; along with the original manuscripts of *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley* and *Villette* it was bequeathed by George Smith's children in the summer of 1938 to the British Museum. On the first page is written in tiny pigeon-track print, "Emily Jane Brontë" and then the words, "Transmitted February 1844";<sup>1</sup> and underneath, *Glendale Poems*, framed by elaborate scroll-work. Has this book ever been examined for unpublished poems, or critically combed for biography? Apparently not. The Smiths through the years showed it to a few friends; indeed the late A. C. Benson, who extracted two poems and some verses for his selected *Brontë Poems*, 1915, has recorded in his *Diary* of July 6, 1914, his first sight of the treasure: "Lunched at the Athenaeum with R. J. Smith.<sup>2</sup> . . . He drew from his pocket a tiny notebook, with poetry written in a most minute hand, almost like printing, with pencil titles scrawled in. The original titles<sup>3</sup> were all personal, like 'Robert to Helen.' This was the original manuscript<sup>4</sup> of Emily Brontë's poems, and it gave me a great thrill. I was interested to find in 'Remembrance' that the original reading in the last line but one was 'Once drinking deep of that *delighted*<sup>5</sup> anguish' with 'delighted'<sup>5</sup> scored out and 'divinest' written in. 'Divinest' simply *makes* the poem. The scrawled titles

<sup>1</sup> Though by their dates some of the poems were added later.

<sup>2</sup> Reginald John Smith, son of George Smith of Smith, Elder and Company who took over *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* from Aylott and Jones.

<sup>3</sup> For the most part Gondal.

<sup>4</sup> One of the original manuscripts.

<sup>5</sup> Really, "delightful."

were Mr. Nicholls'." But A. C. Benson was not concerned with unpublished poems as such or the minutiae of biography. And no other editor knew about this manuscript, or knew about it but did not examine it, or examined it but not with scrupulous attention—neither Clement Shorter, nor W. Robertson Nicoll, nor C. W. Hatfield, nor the editors of the twenty-volume *Shakespeare Head Brontë*, Thomas James Wise and John Alexander Symington. Hence I was able to discover in it many unknown dates for poems (three beginning dates and one finishing date as regards composition, two corrections of dates and thirteen absolutely new dates); as well as many revealing Gondal explanations (the person speaking and the person spoken to); and three (or two and seven-ninths) unpublished poems of Gondal and biographical significance, and—most arresting and intriguing—the name "Louis Parensell" written above the poem, "I knew not 'twas so dire a crime."

Now that poem is a love poem, and I believe a personal love poem, in spite of its Gondal veneer. From the Smith Manuscript we learn its date for the first time: October 17, 1838—the year she fell in love, the year she was "betrayed." Indeed it is the poem written immediately before the famous and significant "Light Up Thy Halls." Charlotte published it posthumously in the selection she appended to the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights*, and it was she who named it, misleadingly, "Last Words." The Gondal notation says "Song by J. Brenzaida to A. S."—in other words, King Julius to Lord Alfred; but as we have seen, Gondal *dramatis personæ* do not mean a great deal in trying to decipher poems biographically since Emily split her personality several ways, requiring only that the *general* theme express her personal feelings to pour her soul out. The general theme is grief and hurt pride at the going away of a loved one—the same theme, really, as in "Light Up Thy Halls," though the latter is a woman addressing a woman instead of a man addressing a man, and is the expression of a more bitter and savage mood. Then what has Louis Parensell to do with this poem in particular and so by inference with the whole story of Emily's tragic love? Who wrote his name—Emily, Charlotte, or Mr. Nicholls—since no other possibilities exist?

Not Emily, I am certain. It would have been unlike her, because too much the direct confession, to record a name



that burned a hole in her brain—or any name. Besides, the half-printed, half-written pencilling is fancier and more nervous and fastidious than her austere plain calligraphy: for instance, she invariably made a capital L with two clean strokes, and not with a finishing-off at the top of the perpendicular and a delicate twirl at the end of the horizontal; nor was her script as *pretty* as in “Louis,” nor her small printed “a” like a figure 2, as in “Parensell”—being, instead, like the back-half of a circle that is guiltless of a tiny vertical tail.

Then Mr. Nicholls? No—in spite of his “ABN”s at the heads of some of the poems and large and small circle-indications of preference, and in spite of his having access to the manuscript and not being afraid to sully it with his hieroglyphics, and the fact that Charlotte could have whispered a confidence about Emily. Marks of preference are less presumptuous than a bald declaration about an author’s beloved, and I cannot believe the curate so rash. The calligraphy of “Louis Parensell” is not so simple, slithering, open and uninteresting as that of Mr. Nicholls. But even if Mr. Nicholls *had* written the name, Charlotte as his informant would have been the one ultimately responsible.

Then by process of elimination Charlotte herself wrote that important memorandum. Does reason bear this out? Does stern study with a microscope? Yes—very decidedly. A. C. Benson’s statement that the pencilled titles were Mr. Nicholls’ was too hasty. They are not; “The Old Man’s Lecture,” “Warning and Reply,” “Encouragement,” and “The Lady to Her Guitar” are Charlotte’s—in accordance with the long-known circumstance that Charlotte edited Emily extensively after Emily’s death. For Charlotte, in preparing her selection, sister-like wanted Emily to appear at her “best.” Hence titles, hence word-changes, in Charlotte’s meticulous autograph. But it was for a different reason that Charlotte wrote “Louis Parensell.”

Why?

Because she either knew or suspected that the tragedy of Emily’s heart, as epitomized with especial force in that poem, involved Louis Parensell, and could not, in her ironical ruminations after Emily’s death, resist recording the fact. Did she *know*? This can never be certain. At least, barring the possibility of a sudden miraculous coming

to light of, say, the personal diary of one of Emily's contemporaries saying in black and white "Emily loved Louis Parensell," or words to the same effect, it can never be certain. But one doubts Charlotte's *knowing* because of the natural secretiveness of Emily's nature; and strong evidence that, in her maturity, she did not make a confidante of Charlotte. Then did Charlotte only suspect, but suspect rightly? It may be. Certainly she was in a position to discover many things about Emily which Emily did not tell her. Seeing Emily repining, she could have had no illusion that the Gondal poems were all Gondal, and, if ignorant, would have been piqued to know their inspiration, and the protagonist of Emily's hard romance. There remains a third possibility: that Charlotte suspected, but wrongly, basing the surmise on an inference. This, if true, would vitiate the Louis Parensell defence against the hypothesis of peculiarity. It would mean that in spite of Charlotte's convinced and deliberate recording of "Louis Parensell" Emily may have cared not a fig for that or any man, and given all her affection to a girl—a woman. I do not know. I announce "Louis Parensell" as a possible but not a certain revelation. I set down these speculations for what they are worth.

Inquiries in Haworth and vicinity have not yet confirmed the existence of a Louis Parensell a hundred years ago.

But it may be significant that the man Charlotte had Shirley love is named Louis; and still more significant that she did not introduce him till she was two-thirds through the book—and Emily dead. Shirley Kildare is Emily; is Louis Moore, Louis Parensell? In giving Shirley Louis, along with health and wealth, was Charlotte following out her original scheme of "making it up" to Emily by giving her prototype Shirley what she did not have but should have had, in life? The enormous delay in introducing Louis Moore, the heroine's lover, is otherwise so strange as to be inexplicable. It has no artistic justification—it seriously mars the unity of the book. But it is completely explained if Louis Moore represented in Charlotte's mind a Louis Parensell whom Emily had tragically loved. While Emily was alive she gave counsel about the growing novel *Shirley*,<sup>1</sup> so that Charlotte may well have feared her remonstrances over a Louis Moore. But I do not think (if the rest of this theory be true) that Charlotte held Louis

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, IV, 13.

up her sleeve; but, rather, that at Emily's death, or when it became obvious Emily was dying, her grief suddenly changed her whole plan—at any cost she must restore to Emily, as a final gift, the Louis whom she knew or suspected Emily had loved. In the awkward formation of the novel there is strong evidence of this kind of violence having been suffered by an original and quite different conception. Nothing fundamental leads up to Louis, and when he puts in a tardy appearance he seems imposed from without, injected. Till then the reader has had every reason to believe that Shirley loves Robert Moore and no reason in the world to infer that she loves him solely for the sake of his brother Louis—whom, indeed, the reader was not aware she even knew. If Charlotte had projected Louis from the first page I cannot think she would have written the novel this way. After all, she was not a neophyte; this was her third novel and she knew something about structure. But having revised her plan, how easy to go back and interpolate mention of a Louis Moore on page 85 as flimsy preparation for his advent in Chapter XXIII, page 569. The interpolation would not show in the manuscript she sent her publisher,<sup>1</sup> for, as a letter plainly states, she re-copied the first of the three volumes.<sup>2</sup> Later, she wrote Ellen apprehensively: "Since you say you could recognise the originals of all except the heroines, pray whom did you suppose the two Moores to represent?"<sup>3</sup> Was Emily, dead, remonstrating at Charlotte's veiled exposure? But this letter was written immediately after *Shirley* was published. With the passage of years her creation of Louis Moore the quiet and grave may well have seemed to her less and less audacious, and Emily less and less accusing; while, meantime, the human itch to touch the high-explosive of that name Louis Parensell caused her to write it exactly where it belonged.

Proof of such things, though powerful, is in the last analysis psychological, which sort of proof is lost upon certain types of mind.

There is no more to be said by the devil's advocate. In general a biographer should take his stand on one side or the other of a controversial fence, but this is a special case, and my main job as I see it is to try to present new and opposing evidence clearly and honestly. I cannot choose

<sup>1</sup> Now in the British Museum.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 305.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 37.

between the two hypotheses in the sense of accepting one and closing my mind against the other; but (not so much because of what has gone before as of what follows after, in the "iron man" cycle which makes no pretence to being Gondal) I do feel pushed a little more toward the hypothesis of peculiarity, interpreting "Louis Parensell" as simply Charlotte's mistaken idea—while asking for more light. But the evidence is inconclusive and everyone will form his own opinion—though not, I hope, before Emily has lived out the last ten years of her life. The verdict will not alter Emily's tragedy; only particularize it. Emily's tragedy (and gloom) was her soul's inability to conform to this world. But to me these two hypotheses, as to the person she loved are definite alternatives; the truth lies with the one or the other or between the two there is no unrelated third possibility.

## XXII

### EXILE'S SAD RETURN

EMILY did not return to Law Hill after Christmas 1838. Perhaps her health broke down. From teaching and long absence from home, the reasons usually assigned? Perhaps, instead, from something mentally hoarded and never divulged of which her kinfolk were ignorant. Or simply because it had been decided in family conclave that the duty of teaching should be rotated. Anne had been idle for a year; Charlotte for seven months. Now it was their turn to fare forth and contribute to the exchequer, and Emily's to rest her bones. But that last is a false figure of speech. When Emily was home she worked very hard, doing the ironing and most of the baking, and getting up at daybreak to finish the heavy chores before Tabby came downstairs.<sup>1</sup> Was she glad to leave Law Hill? or sorry? or glad and sorry at once? It meant no less toil, and a more menial kind; but she was free of the tyranny of the clock.

She celebrated her return with a mediocre poem in which she meets a guiding, comforting, "shadowy spirit," personification of the moors:

And deem thou not that, quite forgot,  
My mercy will forsake thee now:  
I bring thee care, but not despair,  
Abasement, but not overthrow.

To a silent home thy feet may come,  
And years may follow of toilsome pain;  
But yet I swear, by that burning tear,  
The loved shall meet on its hearth again.<sup>2</sup>

The whole clumsy mechanism of the poem seems solely for the purpose of procuring that pathetic promise; which is related to Emily's promise to herself, made the previous November 11, that

the loved and the loving  
Shall meet on the mountains again.

It was this promise which sustained her in her secret trouble. No wonder she repeated it to herself, and invented

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 274; Robinson, 141, 285.

<sup>2</sup> January 12, 1839.

a wavy-haired wraith to repeat it back to her from the moor.

She had longed for home, but when she got there and could remain, she was not happy. How could she be? One carries one's thoughts with one wherever one goes. On January 25 she started out to write a conventional hearts-and-flowers poem, assuming a spring yet far off:

May flowers are opening,  
And leaves unfolding free;  
There are bees in every blossom,  
And birds on every tree.

The sun is gladly shining,  
The stream sings merrily—

but she could not keep it up:

And lonely I am joining,  
And all is dark to me.

Oh, cold, cold is my heart!  
It will not, cannot rise;  
It feels no sympathy  
With those refulgent skies.

Dead, dead is my joy:  
I long to be at rest;  
I wish the damp earth covered  
This desolated breast.

If I were quite alone,  
It might not be so drear  
When all hope was gone:  
At least I could not fear.

But the glad eyes around me  
Must weep as mine have done;  
And I must see the final gloom  
Eclipse their morning sun.

If heaven would rain on me  
That future storm of care,  
So their fond hearts were free,  
I'd be content to bear.

Alas! as lightning withers  
The young and aged tree,  
Both they and I shall fall beneath  
The fate we cannot flee.

This is a fine example of a poem wrestling itself out of the poet's hands and writing itself. How it gathers strength and momentum as it goes, until it reaches that superb

final figure: "Alas! as lightning withers the young and aged tree. . . ." Nor does the wish for death seem, any longer, merely rhetorical; she is beginning to be very serious about death; it has more and more, and lovelier, attractions. She had asked for it, in a crisis, before. It is different to ask for it quietly and steadily, in the morning and in the night, and every day.

Emily generalized naturally and inevitably. She felt doomed; then were not all doomed? was not doom the common lot? She was too secretive to confide; and how put her trouble into words? She had a morbid fear that her family, peering beneath her mask, would see she was not as formerly. Charlotte especially, for all her near-sightedness and spectacles, had falcon-eyes for seeing into souls. She did not want them involved in her doom. They had their own—not like hers, hers was unutterably strange, perhaps not discernible now, but certain to reveal itself. She wanted them to be happy as long as they could; at best there would be precious little time. Just as she got up in the morning to do the hardest part of the work alone, she wished to meet catastrophe alone. It augmented her pain that she could not, entirely.

For in her perverse, stern, unyielding way she loved her family intensely. Sometimes she stood up against her father, being scornful of his pomposities; but was not without tenderness for the old lion-in-his-den (now sixty-one years old and conscious that the man of flesh decays) with snow-white hair and powdered coat-collar, and a penchant for cutting up yards and yards of white lute-string to cover his cravat (it was growing monstrous), behind which he stationed himself as behind a fortress. Ellen Nussey has said: "He was in the habit of covering this cravat himself. We never saw this operation, but we always had to wind for him the white sewing silk which he used. Charlotte said it was her father's one extravagance. . . . Mr. Brontë's cravat went into new silk and new size without taking any off, till at length nearly half his head was enveloped in cravat. His liability to bronchial attacks, no doubt, attached him to this increasing growth. . . ." <sup>1</sup>—which gives a pathetic if slightly ludicrous picture of Emily's father.

Charlotte was too precise, too busy about mighty trivialities, along with her care for profundities, too willing to judge,

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 111.

too measurable and fathomable, to be Emily's spiritual sister; but she was Emily's blood sister; and her remarkable talent for vivid thinking was to Emily a powerful attraction, who among shrivelled intellects longed for the natural aristocracy of those capable of getting excited about ideas. Branwell she had started out by having no affinity for whatsoever, as we have seen; indeed had been jealous of him; until, as he deteriorated, his human need, proportioned to his failure, laid a claim on her compassion; and then had taken him to her heart, regardless of his sex and sins. Anne was sweet; too sweet; there were times when she lost her outline as an individual, so all of a tone she was; yet Emily loved her—loved each of them, this spring of her homecoming that should have been happy and was not.

The season was made notable by Charlotte's rejection of a proposal of marriage from Ellen Nussey's brother Henry, a curate at Donnington in Sussex. The chance to become Ellen's sister-in-law was a great temptation. But, "I could not sit all day long making a grave face before my husband," she wrote. "I would laugh, and satirize, and say whatever came into my head first. . . . Could I conscientiously say that I would take a grave, quiet, young man like Henry?" Charlotte was nothing if not conscientious. She was practical, with pride. It was as if her x-ray eyes pierced through space to a certain sober chronicle in Henry's diary. First he had proposed to Mary Lutwidge, "a steady, intelligent, sensible and, I trust, good girl." Receiving a "decisive reply" from M. A. L.'s papa, "a loss," he recorded, "but I trust a providential one. . . . All right, but God knows best what is good for us, for His church, and for His own glory. Write to a Yorkshire friend, C. B." About Charlotte's refusal he was no less philosophical: "Received an unfavourable reply from 'C. B.' The will of the Lord be done." Before October he was engaged to L. G.<sup>1</sup>

Ellen was trying to lure Charlotte to Brookroyd (or relure, for Charlotte had visited there Christmas); and Charlotte was equally vehement in pressing Ellen to come to Haworth. . . .

On April 8, when the "pawms" were on the willows, Anne went off to her first job, as governess to the two elder children of Mrs. Ingham of Blake Hall, Mirfield. She travelled alone, thinking she could "manage better and

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 171, 172, Note.



summon more courage if thrown entirely upon her own resources." Charlotte was a little worried lest her blue-eyed and not unintelligent sister should fail by stuttering—"I do seriously apprehend that Mrs. Ingham will sometimes consider that she has a natural impediment of speech." But Anne's first letter assured the family all was well, and expressed herself, with characteristic resignation, as "very well satisfied"; though her "charges" were what Charlotte called "desperate little dunces."<sup>1</sup>

But Emily knew what Anne in her mild dogged way suffered. Unable to vent her concern any other way, she wrote one of those transparent poems, outwardly Gondal but fundamentally personal, to "Arthur brother":

One is absent, and for one  
Cheerless, chill is our hearthstone . . .

Thou didst purchase by thy fall  
Home for us and peace for all;  
Yet, how darkly dawned that day!  
Dreadful was the price to pay!

. . . . .

So it is by morn and eve;  
So it is in field and hall;  
For the absent one we grieve:  
One being absent saddens all.<sup>2</sup>

Another good example of how the Gondal myth supports autobiography is the "Song" written three days later, in which she remembers her own brave going-forth to Law Hill and own sad returning:

King Julius left the South Country,  
His banners all bravely flying;  
His followers went out with jubilee,  
But they shall return with sighing.

In the last stanza she makes an unconscious prophecy:

That Death he took a certain aim,—  
For Death is stony-hearted,—  
And in the zenith of his fame  
Both power and life departed.

Charlotte had written Ellen in humorous vein: "I've quite a talent for cleaning—sweeping up hearths, dusting rooms—making beds etc. So if everything else fails—I can

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 175, 176.

<sup>2</sup> April 17, 1839.

turn my hand to that. . . . I won't be a cook—I hate cooking—I won't be a nursery-maid—nor a lady's-maid far less a lady's companion—or a mantua maker—or a straw-bonnet maker or a taker-in of plain-work—I will be nothing but a house-maid. . . .” Nevertheless Emily was the real slavery. Unsparing of herself, she was not fastidious about using her hands. When she worked hard, the edge of her thought was dulled, which was what she wanted—to dull the edge of her remembering mind.<sup>1</sup>

In fancy she had been a boy and was now a man; and fancy was for her reality.

April 28 she again sought relief in truth-saying. “Line” is as sincere and unpretending as “Light Up Thy Halls”—and reveals almost as much of inner life. Harshness was her protection. Feeling too much, she was pleased to make out that she felt nothing, or very little:

The soft unclouded blue of air;  
The earth as golden green and fair,  
And bright as Eden's used to be:  
That air and earth has rested me.

Laid on the grass I lapsed away;  
Sank back again to childhood's day:  
All harsh thoughts perished; memory mild  
Subdued both grief and passion wild.

But did the sunshine even now  
That bathed his stern and swarthy brow,  
Oh, did it wake—I long to know—  
One whisper, one sweet dream in him,  
One lingering joy that, years ago,  
Had faded, lost in distance dim?

That iron man was born like me,  
And he was once an ardent boy:  
He must have felt, in infancy,  
The glory of a summer sky.

Though storms untold his mind have tossed,  
He cannot utterly have lost  
Remembrance of his early home,—  
So lost that not a gleam may come;

No vision of his mother's face  
When she, so fondly mild, set free  
Her darling child from her embrace  
To roam till eve at liberty . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 175, 176.

Silent he sat. That stormy breast  
At length, I said, has deigned to rest;  
At length above that spirit flows  
That waveless ocean of repose.

Let me draw near: 'twill soothe to view  
His dark eyes dimmed with holy dew;  
Remorse even now may wake within,  
And half unchain his soul from sin.

Perhaps this is the destined hour  
When Hell shall lose its fatal power,  
And Heaven itself shall bend above  
To hail the soul redeemed by love.

Unmarked I gazed, my idle thought  
Passed with the ray whose shine it caught;  
One glance revealed how little care  
He felt for all the beauty there.

Oh! crime can make the heart grow old  
Sooner than years of wearing woe,  
Can turn the warmest bosom cold  
As winter wind or polar snow.

Emily was becoming enamoured of this "iron man" whom she had envisaged and now identified with herself. He was hard, as she, praise God, was hard. Why? The answer comes perfectly clear in the last stanza. Because he—because she—had committed a crime.

Now there are all sorts of crimes. Was Emily's—or what she called hers—connected with the searing experience recorded in that violent poem "Light Up Thy Halls"? with the unnaturalness, not of an act, but a feeling? The "iron man" suffered no remorse. But,

Remorse even now may wake within,  
And half unchain his soul from sin.

Wake if the "iron man" gets outside himself and looks on? For it would seem to have been a crime only when viewed from a certain standpoint; unnatural only when seen from without and judged by the majority; being, seen from within, transformed and quite wonderful, a thing to which the "iron man" could remain loyal. There is evidence here of the individual struggling to vindicate himself—herself—against hostile society. Was that possible? The soul had dignity but could it prevail against so vast a foe? It must. This was a matter of life or death—the soul's life or death.

Emily's self-identification with the "iron man" is not conclusive proof of the hypothesis of peculiarity; nor even

her insistence on a "crime"; but they are, it must be admitted, strong arguments in favour of it; and this poem a particularly strong arguer.

So prodigious was Emily's struggle during the year 1839, all other events transpired around her dream-like and scarcely noticed. What to her if late in May Charlotte went as governess to the home of the Sidgwicks at Stonegappe near Skipton and stayed two months? She received a letter: "Dearest Lavinia,—I am most exceedingly obliged to you for the trouble you have taken in seeking up my things and sending them all right. The box and its contents were most acceptable. I only wish I had asked you to send me some letter-paper. This is my last sheet but two. When you can send the other articles of raiment now manufacturing, I shall be right & own glad of them. . . . Don't show this letter to Papa or Aunt, only to Branwell. They will think I am never satisfied, wherever I am. I complain to you because it is a relief . . ." Emily packed and tied packages, and sewed Charlotte's clothes, and went forth to buy letter-paper, but it was all strange. She was thinking of what she had done, and not done, and perhaps of how the world disapproved and yet how little choice she had had from the beginning. Charlotte's other letter of the Sidgwick period was Charlotte at her nicest: "Mine bonnie love, I was as glad of your letter as tongue can express: it is a real, genuine pleasure to hear from home; a thing to be saved till bed time, when one has a moment's quiet and rest to enjoy it thoroughly. Write whenever you can. I could like to be at home. I could like to work in a mill. I could like to feel mental liberty. I could like this weight of restraint to be taken off. But the holidays will come. *Corragio*." <sup>1</sup> Did Charlotte say "courage" to herself or Emily? If to Emily this would suggest that she knew something of Emily's private struggle, and strengthen the Louis Parensell theory. But she may have said it to herself, little recking that her "riotous, perverse, unmanageable cubs" were lambs compared to the incorporeal fiends Emily wrestled with in her breast.

In July Branwell returned from a trip to Liverpool, and excitedly urged the whole family to travel post haste to see the wonder of that harbour full of ships. But Charlotte preferred to go to Cleethorpes with Ellen, and a discussion was provoked as grave as a parliamentary debate. The up-

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 176-181.

shot was Charlotte went with Ellen to Bridlington: rode a train for the first time, and for the first time saw the sea.<sup>1</sup>

But talkings, and refutings, and goings and comings were a dream to Emily—a dream—and of all the nebulous happenings of this tortuous year none more unreal than Charlotte's second proposal. Mr. Bryce, a visiting curate from Dublin University, "witty, lively, ardent, and clever too," fell in love with the unbeautiful but kind and intelligent young lady on sight, and "seasoning his conversation with Hibernian flattery," shortly thereafter made, in Charlotte's words, a "declaration of attachment and proposal of Matrimony" which "beat all." Seeing such things happen to her sister re-impressed Emily with the huge degree of her alienness. She shrank within her; tried to separate the menacing shapes of her imagination, which coagulated like shapes in a nightmare; and was relentlessly sad.

Everything was sad, even bluebells, fragile flowers pitted against the elements.

Sacred watcher, wave thy bells!

She felt tenderness for bluebells, this "iron," this "harsh," this "savage" person:

Blue bell, even as all divine  
I have seen my darling shine;  
Bluebell, even as fair and frail  
I have seen my darling fail.

The bluebell answered,

"Glad I bloom, and calm I fade;  
Dews of heaven are round me stayed;  
Mourner, mourner, dry thy tears:  
Sorrow comes with lengthened years."<sup>2</sup>

"Sorrow comes"; sorrow had indeed come.

Her next poem is fiercely autobiographical, and bitter as wormwood. Disillusionment can go no further. Whether the mood of an hour or the conviction of months, whether written under the shadow of a woman or of Louis Parensell, the poem is Emily speaking plain again, not to be read but to unburden her heart. Almost twenty-one, she broods over the eighteen years since her mother died; recalls the deception of one she fervently loved; accuses her own mind of

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 182-191.

<sup>2</sup> May 9, 1839. Date previously given as May 7.

being infected like every one else's with the dread virus of falsehood. There are no sadder lines in English poetry than these about character, the only thing in the world that really matters:

I am the only being whose doom  
No tongue would ask, no eye would mourn;  
I've never caused a thought of gloom,  
A smile of joy, since I was born.

In secret pleasure, secret tears,  
This changeful life has slipped away,  
As friendless after eighteen years,  
As lone as on my natal day.

There have been times I cannot hide,  
There have been times when this was drear,  
When my sad soul forgot its pride,  
And longed for one to love me here.

But those were in the early glow  
Of feelings, long subdued by care;  
And they have died so long ago,  
I hardly now believe they were.

First melted off the hope of youth;  
Then fancy's rainbow fast withdrew;  
And then experience told me truth  
In mortal bosoms never grew.

'Twas grief enough to think mankind  
All hollow, servile, insincere;  
But worse to trust to my own mind  
And find the same corruption there.<sup>1</sup>

Then, relieved by having faced out the cause of her gloom, and hoping for further relief from an impersonal theme, she wrote the Gondal "Lines to Claudia"—her mind fleeing back to its preoccupation with ultimates. But of course in spite of herself the impersonal turned personal. I quote fragments of her statement of faith:

But I am sure the soul is free  
To leave its clay a little while.

. . . . .

Yet if the soul can thus return,  
I need not, and I will not mourn.

. . . . .

My mortal flesh you might debar,  
But not the eternal fire within,

. . . . .

<sup>1</sup> May 17, 1839.

And brighter in the hour of woe  
 Than in the blaze of victory's pride,  
 That glory-shedding star shall glow,  
 For which we fought and bled and died.<sup>1</sup>

What star? In her life, the star of love. Emily was still loyal, though at times bitter. One is reminded of the star image in the love passages of other poets: of Keats' "Bright Star, would I were steadfast as thou art . . ." and of Shakespeare's magnificent

Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
 Admit impediment. Love is not love  
 Which alters when it alteration finds  
 Or bends with the remover to remove.  
 Ah no, it is an ever-fixed mark  
 Which looks on tempests and is never shaken;  
 It is the star to every wandering bark . . .

Despite pride, resentment and bewilderment, Emily's love did not alter when it alteration found, but was—in sorrowful pain—"an ever-fixed mark."

A week later, while she walked on the moors, her older love, nature, seemed to chide her, and she wrote in gentle melancholy:

I know not how it falls on me,  
 This summer evening hushed and lone,  
 Yet the faint wind comes soothingly  
 With something of an olden tone.  
 Forgive me if I've shunned so long  
 Your gentle greeting, earth and air!  
 But sorrow withers e'en the strong,  
 And who can fight against despair?<sup>2</sup>

One sorrow gathers all other rememberable sorrows unto it, as dear kindred. On June 14 Emily wrote nine stanzas about her dead—her mother, Maria, and Elizabeth. It is not a good poem. Indeed the figure of the setting sun "foretelling" the bright morn "with a rose-red smile" perilously approaches what Emily was singularly free of—the bad taste of sentimentality. But in the end her grief proves its dignity by simplicity:

No; these dark towers are lone and lorn;  
 This very crowd is vacancy;  
 And we must watch and wait and mourn,  
 And half look out for their return,  
 And think their forms we see;

<sup>1</sup> May 28, 1839.

<sup>2</sup> June 3, 1839.

And fancy music in our ear,  
 Such as their lips could only pour;  
 And think we feel their presence near,  
 And start to find they are not here,  
 And never shall be more!

Then, realizing that she was sinking in the slough of despond, a fundamental instinct of self-preservation made Emily struggle against obliteration in that terrible quicksilver:

Month after month, year after year,  
 My harp has poured a dreary strain;  
 At length a livelier note shall cheer,  
 And pleasure tune its chords again.

What though the stars and fair moonlight  
 Are quenched in morning dull and grey?  
 They are but tokens of the night,  
 And *this*, my soul, is day!<sup>1</sup>

But her temperament was too strong for her; her thwarted love rose up and laid her waste, as war lays waste a field. On July 12 she wrote "A Farewell to Alexandria,"<sup>2</sup> a Gondal poem which like many Gondal poems got out of control and went personal. It is signed "E. J. Bronte" and subscribed "Haworth." Had she been away and returned, that Haworth should be recorded instead of taken for granted? Or was she simply copying and perhaps revising an older poem? Probably the latter interpretation, in view of the "couch of snow." She is recalling "July's shine" on a heathery dell and music

So soft, yet so intensely felt;  
 So low, yet so distinctly heard;

and "a darling one" abandoned. Then suddenly by the miracle of association that purely Gondal "darling one" became her doomed self: the being "friendless" and "lone" from "natal day": the "iron man" as a child:

Wakes up the storm more madly wild,  
 The mountain drifts are tossed on high;  
 Farewell, unblest'd, unfriended child,  
 I cannot bear to watch thee die!

The same day she wrote another poem about that iron man who repelled and fascinated her. It is one of her few

<sup>1</sup> June 18, 1839.

<sup>2</sup> Years later Thackeray renamed it "The Outcast Mother" when he printed it in *Cornhill Magazine* (Vol. I, p. 616).



extant poems in rhymed couplets, and is strange—unique—with an eerie quality reminiscent of Coleridge's "Christobel." Perhaps she read "Christobel" and, in passing, was influenced. A mysterious traveller is taken in and fed by peasants, who succumb to the spell of his eyes' "basilisk charm":

No,—lightning all unearthly shone  
Deep in that dark eye's circling zone,—  
Such withering lightning as we deem  
None but a spirit's look may beam . . .

The man, it might be noted, had long black curling hair like Emily's own, and pale skin, like Emily's. Day by day the iron man became more real. Day by day, having imagined him complete, she was shaping herself in his sardonic likeness.

She said a poignant farewell to the child she had been:

Come hither, child; who gifted thee  
With power to touch that string so well?  
How daredst thou wake thoughts in me,  
Thoughts that I would, but cannot quell?<sup>1</sup>

Herself the adult is importuning herself the child. As we have seen, the child explains its gift of poetry by a parable. At six years old, runs the parable, while alone in a dark room and crying, she had a mystic experience involving a spirit or spirits from another world. Is this a memory of an actual event in Emily's childhood? It has been called the Fit Poem, and used (along with the narration of a child's fit in the late Mr. Reed's room in *Jane Eyre*) in an effort to prove that Aunt Branwell or someone punished six-year-old Emily for some misdemeanour by locking her up in her mother's death-chamber, beside the dimly-limned death-bed; that on seeing a light flashed through the window or carried by her liberator she screamed and went into a trance-like fit; which nightmare was marvellously reversed by Maria; which angel, after this first visitation, came again and again to soothe her black moments,<sup>2</sup> so that all her life, when despair overtook her, she cried,

O dream! where art thou now?

As we have said, it is possible. Why fabricate such an episode? It is set down clearly, if circumstantially:

<sup>1</sup> July 19, 1839.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson, 27–31.

But thus it was one festal night,  
 When I was hardly six years old,  
 I stole away from crowds and light  
 And sought a chamber dark and cold.

I had no one to love me there;  
 I knew no comrade and no friend;  
 And so I went to sorrow where  
 Heaven, only Heaven, could me fend.

Low blew the wind 'twas sad to stay  
 From all that splendour barred away.  
 I imagined in the lonely room  
 A thousand forms, a fearful gloom;

And with my wet eyes raised on high,  
 I prayed to God that I might die.  
 Suddenly in the silence drear  
 A sound of music reached my ear;

And then a voice—I hear it yet—  
 So full of soul, so deeply sweet:  
 I thought that Gabriel's self had come  
 To take me to my Father's home.

Three times it rose, that Seraph-strain,  
 Then died away, nor came again;  
 And still the words, and still the tone  
 Dwell in their might when all alone.<sup>1</sup>

Later<sup>2</sup> she was to speak of the same two in another poem:

Child of delight, with sun-bright hair  
 And sea-blue, sea-deep eyes!  
 Spirit of bliss! what brings thee here,  
 Beneath these sullen skies?

The Maria-like angel explains why she has come:

"I—the image of light and gladness—  
 Saw and pitied that mournful boy,  
 And I vowed—if need were—to share his sadness,  
 And give to him my sunny joy."

The mournful boy was surely Emily herself.

Being thorough and having convinced herself of her own doom, in her imagination she followed it out to ultimates. "Shed no tears o'er that tomb," she wrote July 26, speaking of herself as a man foreordained to die:

The time of grace is past,  
 And mercy, scorned and tried,  
 Forsakes to utter wrath at last  
 The soul so steeped in pride.  
 . . . . .

<sup>1</sup> July 19, 1839.

<sup>2</sup> May 28, 1845.

Shut from his Maker's smile  
 The accursed man shall be:  
 For mercy reigns a little while,  
 But hate eternally.

An alternate version changes the last two lines to

Compassion reigns a little while,  
 Revenge eternally.

Hate and revenge were one and the same to Emily. What did her hate, the perversion of her passionate love, brew in the way of revenge? Her thoughts were a nest of vipers these days; she lived in the midst of their writhing.

She had said farewell to childhood and prepared to merge herself entirely in the "iron man" of her imagination. But no farewell is final. She said hers again and again:

Mild the mist upon the hill  
 Telling not of storms tomorrow;  
 No, the day has wept its fill,  
 Spent its store of silent sorrow.

Oh, I'm gone back to the days of youth,  
 I am a child once more,  
 And 'neath my father's sheltering roof,  
 And near the old hall door,

I watch this cloudy evening fall,  
 After a day of rain;  
 Blue mists, sweet mists of summer pall  
 The horizon's mountain chain.

The damp stands in the long green grass  
 As thick as morning's tears;  
 And dreamy scents of fragrance pass  
 That breathe of other years.<sup>1</sup>

The sad love the night, eating and drinking their sadness when the house is quiet and light muffled. Charlotte urges Emily to come to bed:

How long will you remain? The midnight hour  
 Has tolled its last stroke from the minster tower.  
 Come, come: the fire is dead, the lamp burns low;  
 Your eyelids droop, a weight is on your brow;  
 Your cold hands hardly hold the weary pen;  
 Come: morn will give recovered strength again.

<sup>1</sup> July 27, 1839.

But Emily replies:

No: let me linger; leave me, let me be  
A little longer in this reverie;  
I'm happy now; and would you tear away  
My blissful thought that never comes with day:  
A vision dear, though false, for well my mind  
Knows what a bitter waking waits behind?

This "vision dear" was the mysticism which had comforted her at Law Hill. Charlotte rejoins incredulously:

Can there be pleasure in this shadowy room,  
With windows yawning on intenser gloom,  
And such a dreary wind so bleakly sweeping  
Round walls where only you are vigil keeping?  
Besides, your face has not a sign of joy;  
And more than tearful sorrow fills your eye.

They try to persuade her voluntarily to shut out the night by thinking of the glad morning to come—the

white mists rising on the river's breast  
And wild birds bursting from their songless nest. . . .

Still clinging to night Emily does reluctantly concede the greater beauty of day. Why greater? Not because of intrinsic virtue. Because the "splendours of a cloudless sky" (I change the pronouns from masculine to impersonal)

Re-give one shadowy gleams of infancy  
And draw one's tired gaze from futurity.<sup>1</sup>

Many have wondered whether Emily a Victorian ever walked on the moors, at night, alone. Impropriety or not, the answer seems plain: she did. No doubt she had to creep out after Papa and Aunt fell asleep but—she crept. The moor was her place and night her time. Her spirit craved the solace and excitement of the two in conjunction. As witness this fearsome and terrible hinting of August 13:

The starry night shall tidings bring:  
Go out upon the breezy moor,—  
Watch for a bird with sable wing,  
And beak and talons dripping gore.

Look not around, look not beneath,  
But mutely trace its airy way,—  
Mark where it lights upon the heath;  
Then, wanderer, kneel thee down and pray.

<sup>1</sup> August 10, 1839.

What fortune may await thee there,  
 I will not, and I dare not tell;  
 But Heaven is moved by fervent prayer,  
 And God is mercy;—fare thee well!

The same day she again wrote about “an unmarked and an unloved child” among the merry:

What made her weep, what made her glide  
 Out to the park this dreary day,  
 And cast her jewelled chains aside,  
 And seek a rough and lonely way,  
  
 And down beneath a cedar’s shade,  
 On the wet grass regardless lie,  
 With nothing but its gloomy head  
 Between her and the showering sky?

The Gondal legend has again furnished Emily with a fine symbolism. She herself and no one else, in the last analysis, had taken away her joy. She knew that. Was it a necessity of her being, of her soul’s requirement of a hard experience, which made her fling away her “jewelled chains”? Perhaps she really did lie, once, on the wet grass, under a tree, in the rain. The scene is described with the full, sure accent of truth.

About this time an important event took place. Mr. William Weightman, late of Durham University, arrived to assume his duties as Mr. Brontë’s first full-fledged curate.<sup>1</sup> He was young and fair, eloquent and witty; and if slightly conceited, invariably lively and generous. Making feminine hearts palpitate was a habit. With his teasing flattery and humorous sallies he ingratiated himself even with Aunt, so that when he had finished conferring with Mr. Brontë in the study and joined the girls in the parlour, that redoubtable lady often descended from her retreat to pour tea for the chatterers.<sup>2</sup>

“Among the curates,” said Ellen Nussey, “Mr. Weightman was Emily’s only exception for any conventional courtesies. . . .”<sup>3</sup> And to Sir W. Robertson Nicoll she described Emily, while walking on the moors with Weightman and the others, in a sudden mood of abandonment running and dancing.<sup>4</sup> Is it surprising that Emily was

<sup>1</sup> Mr. William Hodgson had served only temporarily and without remuneration. (*Life and Letters*, I, 201, Note.)

<sup>2</sup> Robinson, 93.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 274.

<sup>4</sup> *The British Weekly*, October, 1908; Chadwick, 166.

attracted to this man? Is the theory that she preferred women weakened thereby? No; if anything strengthened. Thus Shirley disdained dominant, markedly masculine men, but cared for gentle Philip and girlish Mr. Sweeting. For women of the masculine type if they care for men at all instinctively choose feminine men, to offset their own quality. That is exactly what Mr. William Weightman was: feminine. A certain girlishness of looks, manner and taste was the outstanding thing about him. Just as Emily was called the Major, he by common consent was dubbed Miss Celia Amelia. They balanced and respected each other. But there is not an iota of evidence that anything like love ever existed between them. If not Louis Parensell, her nature and her shattering experience had made Emily immune. For in any case love was over and done in her heart. She could not retract. She could only ease herself a little by not rejecting Mr. Weightman's joviality. And at this time—the August of his arrival—even that slight bond was as yet unestablished. In Church she eyed him soberly; in her father's house sedately passed him the steaming cup of tea; while she continued to write poems about a struggle unrelated to Willy Weightman.

It was peaceful at home. Anne was still with Mrs. Ingham. Charlotte was at the seaside with Ellen. Branwell was off on his not very brave enterprises. At the end of summer, influenced by Mr. Weightman's amiable presence, Emily wrote a shade less dejectedly:

Fair sinks the summer evening now  
 In softened glory round my home;  
 The sky upon its holy brow  
 Wears not a cloud that speaks of gloom.

The old tower, shrined in golden light,  
 Looks down on the descending sun;  
 So gently evening blends with night,  
 You scarce can say that day is done.

And this is just the joyous hour  
 When we were wont to burst away,  
 To 'scape from labour's tyrant power  
 And cheerfully go out to play.

Then why is all so sad and lone?  
 No merry foot-step on the stair;  
 No laugh—no heart-awaking tone,  
 But voiceless silence everywhere?

I've wandered round our garden-ground,  
 And still it seemed at every turn  
 That I should greet approaching feet,  
 And words upon the breezes borne.

She asks, Are they gone forever?

"Ah no," reproving hope doth say,  
 "Departed joys 'tis fond to mourn,  
 When every storm that rides this way  
 Prepares a more divine return."<sup>1</sup>

Emily wandered about the garden-plot in the warm evening, thinking these thoughts. The currant bushes quivered. The leaves of the lilac were heart-shaped.

She sat down at the pianoforte, which she played with precision and a kind of virtuoso brilliancy,<sup>2</sup> and let her hands wander up and down the keyboard while a mournful improvisation of sound floated out upon the evening. Ellen Nussey has said that "the ability with which she took up music was amazing, the style, the touch and the expression were those of a professor absorbed heart and soul in his theme."<sup>3</sup>

As all roads lead to Rome, all of Emily's thoughts led back inexorably to the thought of her lost love. "Song" is obviously the answer to an overture from someone asking friendship. Emily had no reason nor wish to refuse Anne. Then Charlotte? No, it is too passionate in its suppression. Then her lost love, who perhaps regretted their estrangement and hoped to forget an anomalous relation by the adoption of a conventional one? Possibly. If such a proposal was made, it caught Emily in a gentle rather than a savage mood, with her erstwhile wish to hurt in abeyance if not dead; having only a sad recognition of the hopelessness of reconciling her habit of grief with the other's habit of pleasure. Except when her dæmon agitated her, time had taught her to remember with mildness; except when responding to her tragic destiny, she was not incapable of simple human reasonableness:

Oh, between distress and pleasure  
 Fond affection cannot be!  
 Wretched hearts in vain would treasure  
 Friendship's joys when others flee.

<sup>1</sup> August 30, 1839.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 114.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 274.

Well I know thine eye would never  
 Smile, when mine grieved, willingly;  
 Yet I know thine eye forever  
 Could not weep in sympathy.

No, Emily had felt and still felt a certain way; she could not pretend to feel differently; she was too honest for that, to the world and to herself:

Let us part; the time is over  
 When I thought and felt like thee;  
 I will be an ocean rover,  
 I will sail the desert sea.

—the sea of infinity, toward which, for solace, she now turned her speculating mind

Isles there are beyond its billow:  
 Lands where woe may wander free;  
 And, beloved, thy midnight pillow  
 Will be soft unwatched by me.

Not on each returning morrow,  
 When thy heart bounds ardently,  
 Needst thou then dissemble sorrow,  
 Marking my despondency.

Day by day some dreary token  
 Will forsake thy memory,  
 Till at last, all old links broken,  
 I shall be a dream to thee.<sup>1</sup>

Unwritten words brood behind the written. She does not say, "You shall be a dream to me"—that would not have been true—but "I shall be a dream to you."

Emily loved the truth. She loved it so much she was appalled at having to hide from the world certain truths; loved it so much she was sometimes bitter at the futility of loving it:

There was a time when my cheek burned  
 To give such scornful words the lie;  
 Ungoverned nature madly spurned  
 The law that bade it not defy.  
 Oh! in the days of ardent youth  
 I would have given my life for truth.

For truth, for right, for liberty,  
 I would have gladly, freely died;  
 And now I calmly bear, and see  
 The vain man smile, the fool deride;  
 Though not because my heart is tame;  
 Though not for fear, though not for shame.

<sup>1</sup> October 15, 1839.



My soul still chokes at every tone  
 Of selfish and self-clouded error;  
 My breast still braves the world alone,  
 Steeled as it ever was to terror.  
 Only I know, howe'er I frown,  
 The same world will go rolling on.<sup>1</sup>

This is one of the poems which prove how deeply Emily was concerned with moral issues.

Late this October she reprimanded herself in a poem called "Sympathy." No matter what she had lost, did she not have her family? She says:

There should be no despair—though tears  
 May flow down like a river:  
 Are not the best beloved of years  
 Around your heart forever?

They weep, you weep,—it must be so;  
 Winds sigh as you are sighing,  
 And winter sheds its grief in snow  
 Where autumn's leaves are lying:  
 Yet, these revive, and from their fate  
 Your fate cannot be parted:  
 Then, journey on, if not elate,  
 Still *never* broken-hearted!

It was no good—she was broken-hearted and no self-cajolery, no philosophy, could mend the fact now. She was more truly herself when she admitted it frankly, as in the following rich revelation:

The wind I hear it sighing  
 With autumn's saddest sound;  
 Withered leaves as thick are lying  
 As spring-flowers on the ground.

This dark night has won me  
 To wander far away;  
 Old feelings gather fast upon me,  
 Like vultures round their prey.

Kind were they once and cherished,  
 But cold and cheerless now:  
 I would their lingering shades had perished  
 When their light left my brow.

'Tis like old age pretending  
 The softness of a child,  
 My altered, hardened spirit bending  
 To meet their fancies wild.

<sup>1</sup> October, 1839.

Yet could I with past pleasures  
 Past woe's oblivion buy,  
 That by the death of my dearest treasures  
 My deadliest pain might die,

Oh, then another daybreak  
 Might haply dawn above,  
 Another summer gild my cheek,  
 My soul, another love.<sup>1</sup>

Could this be clearer? What a fine metaphor, the indecently hasty and cruel vultures. "My altered, hardened spirit" She had admired the "iron man" too long. At twenty-one she considered herself finished. The wistful fancy about another dawn, another love, made her despair more terrible. There would be no second dawn after this night; no second love. On the note of love the poem, like her life, stopped — she could not get beyond it. In a deep sense she did not wish to go beyond it. If love had thorns, it was also sweet.

It had long sharp thorns:

Love is like the wild rose-briar,  
 Friendship, like the holly tree—  
 The holly is dark when the rose-briar blooms,  
 But which will bloom most constantly?

The wild rose-briar is sweet in spring,  
 Its summer blossoms scent the air;  
 Yet wait till winter comes again,  
 And who will call the wild-briar fair?

Then scorn the silly rose-wreath now,  
 And deck thee with the holly's sheen,  
 That when December blights thy brow,  
 He still may leave thy garland green.<sup>2</sup>

Her next poem is an interlude, unconnected with what went before or came afterward: "Stanzas to — Far, Far Away. . . ." Who died? . . . But Emily was so sensitive to impressions she may have been affected by the death of someone almost a stranger:

Well, some may hate, and some may scorn,  
 And some may quite forget thy name;  
 But my sad heart must ever mourn  
 Thy ruined hopes, thy blighted name!

. . . . .

<sup>1</sup> October 29, 1839.

<sup>2</sup> October or November, 1839. This poem was for a long time erroneously attributed to Charlotte.

Do I despise the timid deer,  
 Because his limbs are fleet with fear?  
 Or, would I mock the wolf's death-howl,  
 Because his form is gaunt and foul?  
 Or, hear with joy the leveret's cry,  
 Because it cannot bravely die?  
 No! Then above his memory  
 Let Pity's heart as tender be . . .<sup>1</sup>

Being an "occasional poem" this is outside the main sequence of Emily's life. And yet it is highly pertinent to an understanding of her character. Such compassion the saints have suffered.

Then she wrote four lines freighted with symbolic meaning:

The wind was rough which tore  
 That leaf from its parent tree;  
 The fate was cruel which bore  
 The withering corpse to me.<sup>2</sup>

It was now late in the year. Snow fell, the wind howled; many hods of peat were lugged from the peat room behind the parlour and piled on the grates; many scuttles of ashes removed. Fires are good things to dream in front of. Heat-trapping coals rich with undulations dropped, crumbled, whited. Charlotte wrote Ellen: "Have you forgotten the sea by this time Ellen? is it grown dim in your mind? or can you still see it, dark blue and green and foaming and hear it—roaring roughly when the wind is high or rushing softly when it is calm? . . . I am as well as need be, and very fat." Toward the end of November Tabby grew so lame from a large ulcer on her leg she was forced to go live with her sister in a little house her savings had bought. With only a child to run errands, Charlotte and Emily were as busy as beavers. "I manage the ironing and keep the rooms clean," Charlotte informed Ellen, "Emily does the baking and attends to the kitchen—we are such odd animals that we prefer this mode of contrivance to having a new face among us. Besides we do not despair of Tabby's return and she shall not be supplanted by a stranger in her absence. I excited Aunt's wrath very much by burning the clothes the first time I attempted to Iron but I do better now. Human feelings are queer things—I am much happier—black-leading the stoves—making the beds and sweeping the floors at home, than I should be

<sup>1</sup> November 14, 1839.

<sup>2</sup> November 23, 1839.

living like a fine lady anywhere else." And Emily was happier, working yeasty bread-dough with floury hands for her fine light bread that was locally famous, scrubbing pans and emptying slops. No, not happier: that implies what had not, for a long time, been true: less unhappy.<sup>1</sup>

But menial tasks did not shut Emily's ears to the wind. It was the tremendous *motif* relating her present to her past:

That wind, I used to hear it swelling  
 With joy divinely leep;  
 You might have seen my hot tears welling,  
 But rapture made me weep.

I used to love on winter nights  
 To lie, and dream alone  
 Of all the rare and real delights  
 My lonely years had known.<sup>2</sup>

Anne came home from Mrs. Ingham's for Christmas, and the following extract may have been written to her in melancholy realization that years of separation made it impossible to begin where they had left off:

Come, walk with me; there's only thee  
 To bless my spirit now;  
 We used to love on winter nights  
 To wander through the snow.  
 Can we not woo back old delights?  
 The clouds rush dark and wild . . .<sup>3</sup>

Disregarding Charlotte and Branwell she speaks of death as having "stolen our company" and left them "only two" and therefore more dependent upon and dear to each other. But Anne answers (with a hard reality less characteristic of her than Emily) that the flower, once having drooped, cannot be revived "though the soil be wet with tears":

The vital sap once perished  
 Will never flow again;  
 And surer than that dwelling dread,  
 The narrow dungeon of the dead,  
 Time parts the hearts of men.<sup>3</sup>

She and Anne would always love each other with a special love, but never again "be like twins." Emily travelled alone.

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 191-194; Gaskell, 139.

<sup>2</sup> November 28, 1839.

<sup>3</sup> November or December, 1839.

But not quite alone; attended and diverted by fancy. We possess a large crop of fanciful poems from this December: vagaries of the firelight, imaginations, dreams. Of December 14:

I've been wandering in the greenwoods,  
And 'mid flowery, smiling plains;  
I've been listening to the dark floods,  
To the thrush's thrilling strains.

I have gathered the pale primrose,  
And the purple violet sweet;  
I've been where the asphodel grows,  
And where lives the red deer fleet.

. . . . .

I've been where the poplar is springing  
From the fair enamelled ground,  
While the nightingale is singing  
With a solemn, plaintive sound.

Some of this is "made up"; but some of it (like "enamelled ground") is charming. Fancy made her forget if only for an hour her hard situation.

There was sickness in Haworth; and a continuous funeral procession under the front windows. In a tender poem Emily compares two deaths:

Heaven's glory shone where he was laid  
In life's decline,  
I turned me from that young saint's bed  
To gaze on thine.

It was a summer day that saw  
His spirit's flight;  
Thine parted in a time of awe,  
A winter's night.<sup>1</sup>

It does not greatly matter whom she wrote of. The point is she was brooding on death; drawing nearer and nearer the mystery; fascinated and subdued by it. The thought of death more and more conditioned her life. At the top of a little poem on this doleful subject she wrote, "That Word 'Never' ":

Not many years, but long enough to see  
No ten can deal such deadly misery  
As the dear friend untimely called away;  
And still the more beloved, the greater still  
Must be the aching void, the withering chill  
Of each dark night, and dim, beclouded day.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Between December 14 and 19, 1839.

<sup>2</sup> December 23, 1839.

Not a distinguished poem; far from Emily's best; but biographically significant of a state of mind.

1839 was approaching its end—a momentous year for Emily. The tragedy which transpired in the spring of 1838 had been confirmed in her heart during 1839. Now that it had seeped into and saturated her subconscious, it was fast as the juice of certain berries: she was stained forever.

And yet she wrote more poetry in 1839 than in any year before or after. This was partly because she had fallen in love with the sorrowful destiny which in a spirit of fatality she foresaw, and the grim romance set her singing.

In December, when “normal” people were decorating fir-trees and gathering red-berried holly, what were her thoughts?

I gazed within thy earnest eyes,  
And read the sorrow brooding there;  
I heard the young heart torn with sighs,  
And envied such despair.<sup>1</sup>

She envied someone else's despair, or fancied that someone ought to envy hers—it is all the same. Christmas was come; dear ones crowded around her; there was frivolity in the parlour; almost certainly Mr. William Weightman cracked coy jokes about permitting mistletoe hung high, and Branwell answered brilliant and loud. Perhaps Emily laughed. Without doubt she laughed—if only to make plausible the rôle she habitually played before her singularly unsuspecting family, of a robust unrepining household drudge. Her real self she hid from all save white oblongs of paper to which, when her door was locked, she confided in painful black characters:

Go to the grave in youth's bare woe!  
That dream was written long ago.

<sup>1</sup> December 19, 1839.

## XXIII

### MIRAGE OF MERRIMENT

BUT it is surprising how much a human being can suffer, and stubbornly return to his hope. Emily had sent out an engraved invitation to death. But now the ancient will to live pressed subtly like an excess of blood in her veins. Perhaps, ignoring the past, she could make of herself a new person. Willy Weightman's presence strongly urged that all might be saved by merriment. It occurred to Emily that if she studied and applied herself to light-heartedness, as children to the catechism, she might be eligible for that confirmation which is forgiveness of sins. It was worth trying. It was an honourable hope. So she must have reasoned, enticed away from her destiny by the sound of laughter.

But such heroic campaigns are not decided on, nor entered on, nor fought through in a day. She had to take a good look at the past before she could abandon it, and, while looking, was trapped. She wrote a plaint, a passionate harking back, another hail and farewell to her love; from which these revelatory stanzas are carved:

Thy sun is near meridian height,  
And my sun sinks in endless night;  
But if that night bring only sleep,  
Then I shall rest, when thou wilt weep.

And say not that my early tomb  
Will give me to a darker doom:  
Shall these long agonizing years  
Be punished by eternal tears?

No! that I feel can never be;  
A God of hate could hardly bear  
To watch through all eternity  
His own creation's dread despair.

The pangs that wring my mortal breast  
Must claim from Justice lasting rest;  
Enough, that this departing breath  
Will pass in anguish worse than death.

If I have sinned, long, long ago  
That sin was purified by woe:  
I've suffered on through night and day;  
I've trod a dark and frightful way.

. . . . .

How could I ask for pitying love,  
 When that grim concave frowned above,  
 Hoarding its lightnings to destroy  
 My only and my priceless joy?

. . . . .

All heaven's undreamt felicity  
 Could never blot the past from me.

No! years may cloud and death may sever,  
 But what is done, is done forever;  
 And thou, false friend and treacherous guide,  
 Go, sate thy cruel heart with pride.

Go, load my memory with shame;  
 Speak but to curse my hated name;

. . . . .

Then come again; thou wilt not shrink—  
 I know thy soul is free from fear—

. . . . .

The raving, dying victim see,  
 Lost, cursed, degraded, all for thee!  
 Gaze on the wretch, recall to mind  
 His golden days long left behind.

. . . . .

O Memory, wake! Let scenes return  
 That e'en her haughty heart must mourn!

Reveal, where o'er a lone green wood  
 The moon of summer pours,  
 Far down from heaven, its silver flood,  
 On deep Eldenna's shores;

There, lingering in the wild embrace,  
 Youth's warm affections gave . . .

. . . . .

Well, thou hast paid me back my love!  
 But, if there be a God above,  
 Whose arm is strong, whose word is true,  
 This hell shall wring thy spirit too!<sup>1</sup>

There it is, all of it: apparently the same testimony as in "Light Up Thy Halls" and similar poems, but factually more candid. Again her masculine leaning is made plain; again the beloved is feminine; again a cry for death, that a "sin" may be forgotten; again a belief that her agony has wiped out that "sin"; again an intimation that heaven as well as earth (moral law as well as man-made law) is organized against her "only and priceless joy"; again she

<sup>1</sup> January 6, 1840.



cleaves to, while repudiating, the past; again accuses the other of treachery first and pride second, and, as a result, her own near-madness, degradation, perhaps death; again cites the scene in the "lone green glade," now a "lone green wood." But this time she speaks of a "wild embrace," of "youth's warm affections," before that last bitter cry, "Well, thou hast paid me back my love!" But there is one notable difference. In "Light Up Thy Halls" she wished suffering on her beloved; now she only observes the inevitability of that suffering. It is useless to argue that the poem is merely Gondal, first, because nothing of this fierceness is merely Gondal, and, second, because this same theme has been reiterated too often to be a passing concern.

Probably she hoped that by putting this terrible thing into secret and hoarded words, she could get rid of it. And it appears she did, for a while and to a degree.

The womenfolk had been busy preparing Branwell for his duties as tutor to Mr. Postlethwaite of Broughton-in-Furness: shirt-making, collar-stitching, and sock-darning. Now he was gone; Emily's sympathetic eyes had followed him down the road; and it remained to be seen whether Charlotte's fear had been well-grounded. Branwell was full of hope and resolution but "I," she had written Ellen, "who know his variable nature, and his strong turn for active life, dare not be too sanguine."<sup>1</sup> Almost immediately, "Well, what am I?" he wrote "Old Knave of Trumps," John Brown the sexton. "That is, what do they think I am? A most calm, sedate, sober, abstemious, patient, mild-hearted, virtuous, gentlemanly philosopher. . . . Cards are shuffled under the table-cloth, glasses are thrust into the cupboard if I enter the room. I take neither spirits, wine, nor malt liquors. I dress in black, and smile like a saint or martyr. This is a fact, as I am a living soul, and right comfortably do I laugh at them. . . . I took a half-year's farewell of old friend whisky at Kendall on the night after I left. . . . We ordered in supper and whisky-toddy as 'hot as hell.' . . . I gave sundry toasts, that were washed down . . . till the room spun around and the candles danced in our eyes. . . . I found myself in bed next morning, with a bottle of porter, a glass, and a corkscrew beside me. Since then I have not touched anything stronger than milk-and-water, nor, I hope, shall, till I return at mid-summer. I am getting as fat as Prince William at Springhead. . . ."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 194, 195.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 198-200.

He was also getting disillusioned. "This world is all rottenness," he had written J. H. Thompson in August;<sup>1</sup> and now in March he wrote John Brown, "Oh, the falsehood and hypocrisy of this world!"<sup>2</sup>

Cold weather was more monotonous than open weather, because it held the Parsonage with its primitive sanitation and uneven heat in the vice of a strict régime. But this year the three girls (Anne had not returned to Blake Hall after Christmas) were treated to several diversities while snow still swirled: they learned that Mr. Bryce had died as impetuously as he had asked Charlotte to marry him; in January postage adhesive stamps were introduced in place of the old circular postmarks; Ellen coming in late February took her turn at being smitten with the unclerical Willy Weightman; and Cousin-by-marriage William Morgan of Bradford loomed on the horizon. Charlotte reported irreverently: "By Miss Weightman's aid we got on pretty well—it was amazing to see with what patience and good temper the innocent creature endured that fat Welshman's prosing—though she confessed afterwards that she was almost done up by his long stories. . . . Aunt has been at times precious cross since you went—however she is rather better now."<sup>3</sup>

Charlotte protested politely that they felt dull without Ellen, and no doubt momentarily believed it. But the Parsonage never had been and never would be dull while Willy Weightman spread his innocent snares. On February 14 he had walked ten miles to post delicate-tinted anonymous valentines: one to each girl, generously sprinkled with "fond loves" and "souls divine," and one with "Fair Ellen, Fair Ellen."<sup>4</sup> Then he had got them invited to tea at the home of a married clergyman who promised to chaperone them to and from his lecture on the classics at the Mechanics' Institute in Keighley. The whole party, bursting in at midnight, had been too merry to be disconcerted by the ill temper of Miss Branwell, who had prepared hot coffee in a bronze-and-pewter pot with basket handle<sup>5</sup> for the *girls only*. Then Charlotte had commenced his "portrait," and the troop surged over to the Hoyles' where the young man boarded, to stay longer and longer each sitting (it "was alarming"), while Willy Weightman made Charlotte try on his clerical gown, calling attention to the silk velvet and adornments, and charming and edifying

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 187.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 198.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 201.

<sup>4</sup> Robinson, 95.

<sup>5</sup> Museum.

his inexperienced audience by a fund of romantic fooling.<sup>1</sup> He was helped in revolutionizing the Parsonage by Mr. Collins, another curate new to the neighbourhood. Charlotte became rollicking and almost arch. "My dear Mrs. Menelaus" she addressed Ellen (perhaps because Menelaus was the "successful suitor for the peerless Helen"), and signed herself "Ça Ira" and "Caliban."

And Emily? She too had received a valentine; and helped compose and sign the "Roland for his Oliver"<sup>2</sup>; and walked home from Keighley four miles under the stars; and parried the shafts of "Miss Celia Amelia," giving as good as she got; and sat through many teas, "her countenance glimmering."<sup>3</sup> "She did what we did," Ellen Nussey has said of this period, "and never absented herself when she could avoid it."<sup>4</sup> She really caught the gleeful malady to which she exposed herself, but, in view of the partial immunity necessarily set up by old repinings, hers was never a severe case. According to behavioristic psychology, it is less true that one acts happy because one is happy than that one is happy because one acts happy. In any event Emily had, at times, a most sweet illusion; at times imagined that, smarter than the leopard, she had changed her spots.

But though one can deceive oneself by day, one cannot at dead of night. There is a "dead of night poem," of March, in which Emily has the old unhappy solace of imagining herself in the grave, while her sinning or sinned against beloved (which?—Emily never could decide) lies in bed, at such an hour, remorseful. A knotted and twisted poem, nevertheless it can be unravelled. Here are the more significant passages:

Far away is mirth withdrawn;  
'Tis three long hours before the morn;  
And I watch lonely, drearily:  
So come, thou shade, commune with me.

. . . . .

I will not name thy blighted name,  
Tarnished by unforgotten shame;

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 201, Note.

<sup>2</sup> A Roland for your Oliver  
We think you've justly earned;  
You sent us such a valentine  
Your gift is now returned. *Etc.*

<sup>3</sup> Robinson, 93.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

Though not because my bosom torn  
Joins the mad world in all its scorn . . .

For, Emily makes her lost love say:

when I hear thy foes deride  
I must cling closely to thy side.

Our mutual foes! They will not rest  
From trampling on thy buried breast;  
Glutting their hatred with the doom  
They picture thine bey and the tomb.

But God is not like human-kind;  
Man cannot read the Almighty mind;  
Vengeance will never torture thee,  
Nor hunt thy soul eternally.

What have I dreamt? He lies asleep,  
With whom my heart would vainly weep:  
He rests, and I endure the woe  
That left his spirit long ago.

This, it will be seen, is exactly in line with the other autobiographical poems. But a new fact may be gleaned: the world scorned them, damned both of them to hell—or would, if it knew all about them. What does this point to if not to a peculiar proclivity? Had long thinking made Emily clearer as to its nature and results? She was aghast. But she was also deeply comforted by a new conviction that God was more compassionate than her evangelical contemporaries.

With what irony Emily listened to Mr. Weightman and Mr. Collins delivering “noble, eloquent, high-Church, apostolical succession discourses” against Dissenters.<sup>1</sup> If they but knew the scope of her “dissenting”! Why, the Methodists were nothing! the Baptists were nothing! She sat very still in the Brontë pew, her eyes interrogating their passionate faces. Her passion was not on her face: it was inside of her; it was implicit in her vitals. Not only the terrible problem growing out of her baffled love, but her native temperament, her yearning for a larger life of the spirit, had long since caused her mind to discard her father’s Church of England—not as wrong, as inadequate; not because she did not believe, but because she believed

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 202.

so intensely. Her creed was the wind. She did not learn of the infinite from books, nor from Mr. Collins nor Mr. Weightman nor Papa, but from plunging, sinking into the infinite and letting it lave over her. . . .

April was always a lovely month. The snow melted on the moors and Emily walked on springy new grass. Charlotte was making a bag for Ellen; Ellen had sent her "a very pretty Turkish-looking thing"; and Emily, though she did not care much for sewing, may, under Aunt's tutelage, have tamed her fingers with lace-pins or crochet hooks or a fine embroidery needle with a sharp point and little golden eye. Charlotte and Emily and Anne are usually thought of as plain and undecorated; but actually they possessed a great many articles of embellishment, such as unassignable bead necklaces,<sup>1</sup> a jet necklace,<sup>1</sup> hair bracelets,<sup>1</sup> a small shawl with latticed silk stripes and printed yellow and plum-coloured leaves on a white cotton ground,<sup>1</sup> a large stone-coloured cashmere shawl with six inch, hand-made silk fringe,<sup>1</sup> a thin paisley with black centre and broad red and blue bars which had belonged to their mother,<sup>1</sup> brooches,<sup>1</sup> locketts,<sup>1</sup> and rings.<sup>1</sup> It cannot therefore be doubted that they took some pleasure in gewgaws and trinkets and baubles such as women are credited, as a sex, with loving, but which men love also. Emily had an ample-skirted dress made from some white stuff splendidly shot through with lilac strokes of lightning, which she herself, to the astonishment of Charlotte and Ellen, bought in Bradford.<sup>2</sup> And yet she did not consider such things really important: she played with them; smiled at their rich colours; and once in a while decked herself out and was quietly amused by the startled looks of those who tended to take her figure for granted, as if it did not have magnificent possibilities. Then, if ever, she must have looked with Shirley "like a queen." And when did she deck herself if not now, when winter had broken into spring?—when, spurred by Willy Weightman's example, she had resolved to test the virtue of merriment against the foreseen hour of her death? But spring was less powerful than the thought of death.

In April she wrote three stanzas, perhaps to Maria, dead in body, perhaps to her love, dead in the sense of separated from her forever.

<sup>1</sup> Museum.

<sup>2</sup> Robinson, 286.

It is too late to call thee now;  
 I will not nurse that dream again;  
 For every joy that lit my brow  
 Would bring its after-storm of pain.

Besides, the mist is half withdrawn;  
 The barren mountain-side lies bare;  
 And sunshine and awaking morn  
 Paint no more golden visions there.

Yet, ever in my grateful breast,  
 Thy darling shade shall cherished be;  
 For God alone doth know how blest  
 My early years have been in thee!

Then came four stanzas to someone going to die (but who was not?):

I'll not weep that thou art going to leave me,  
 There's nothing lovely here;

So, if a tear, when thou art dying,  
 Should haply fall from me,  
 It is but that my soul is sighing,  
 To go and rest with thee.<sup>1</sup>

Later she shifted back to her first viewpoint, in a poem rather charming in a gracefully unimportant way:

'Tis moonlight, summer moonlight,  
 All soft and still and fair;  
 The silent time of midnight  
 Shines sweetly everywhere.

But most where trees are sending  
 Their breezy boughs on high,  
 Or stooping low are lending  
 A shelter from the sky.

And there in those wild bowers  
 A lovely form is laid;  
 Green grass and dew-steeped flowers  
 Wave gently round her head.<sup>2</sup>

Was there a special reason for this series of poems? The answer is, not necessarily. Emily Brontë was not a rationalist but a poet, with all the privileges thereof. It is impossible to say sometimes—and this is one—what is fact and what fancy. Perhaps the spring simply affected Emily so. Perhaps those who had died and those who must some day die blended, in her mind, into a composite person, who

<sup>1</sup> May 4, 1840.

<sup>2</sup> May 13, 1840.

evoked the melancholy all her suppressing had not diminished.

But there can be no doubt about "The Appeal"—it has the clear *timbre* of the true and unfabricated. The burial in the foregoing poem may symbolize her acceptance of desertion. But now, as always when irresistibly impelled by the strength of her emotion, she relies on the emotion itself, naked, by similes and metaphors unadorned:

If grief for grief can touch thee,  
If answering woe for woe,  
If any ruth can melt thee,  
Come to me now!

I cannot be more lonely,  
More drear I cannot be!  
My worn heart throbs so wildly,  
'Twill break for thee.

And when the world despises,  
When Heaven repels my prayer,  
Will not mine angel comfort?  
Mine idol hear?

Yes, by the tears I've poured thee,  
By all my hours of pain,  
O, I shall surely win thee,  
Beloved, again!<sup>1</sup>

"Win thee" is so much the masculine point of view.

For the moment Emily as a student of mirth was a failure. She seems to have realized it—writing no poems for four months. Perhaps she reacted violently away from her sadness and was comparatively happy, and did not need to write poems, for her emotional nature was fulfilled in another way. But in the absence of any clue to the summer of 1840 it is not permitted to conjecture. Branwell came home in June. Charlotte visited Mary Taylor, and Mary the Parsonage. From time to time Charlotte gave Ellen the benefit of advice on love and marriage, to the effect that "intense *passion*" was "no desirable feeling": "My good girl 'une grande passion' is 'une grande folie.' I have told you so before—and I tell it you again. Mediocrity in all things is wisdom—mediocrity in the sensations is superlative wisdom." With this Emily could never have agreed. To prove that no one should love a man before marriage (and then not overmuch), Charlotte reminded

<sup>1</sup> May 18, 1840.

Ellen of "an instance of a Relative of mine who cared for a young lady till he began to suspect that she cared more for him and then instantly conceived a sort of contempt for her"—obviously Mary Taylor and Branwell. Poor Mary Taylor whose "price was above rubies." . . . About August 1 their Cornish kin, John Branwell Williams and his wife and daughter, stopped off for twenty-four hours—just long enough for Charlotte to decide that she did not admire them. "To my eyes," she wrote her unfailing audience, "there seemed to be an attempt to play the great Mogul down in Yorkshire." Emily's eyes were keen too—what had she seen? In July and August "Miss Celia Amelia" was in Ripon taking ecclesiastical examinations and—taking out the ladies. "I am fully convinced Ellen," Charlotte wrote, "that he is a thorough male flirt"—and listed Sarah Sugden, Caroline Drury, Agnes Walton, and "an enamorata in Swansea." It seems the young man habitually thought in large numbers. He sent the Brontës a brace of wild ducks, a brace of black grouse, a brace of partridges, a brace of snipes, a brace of curlews and a large salmon; and it is supposed that Emily, in charge of the kitchen, cooked them. Whereupon a bale of forty French books arrived from Gomersal, which Charlotte called "clever wicked sophistical and immoral," but did not return unread; and presently reappeared the inimitable Mr. Weightman—so whatever the summer had been, the autumn was lively.<sup>1</sup>

In September Branwell again set off to seek his fortune, in "the wild, wandering, adventurous, romantic, knight-errant-like capacity of clerk in the Leeds and Manchester Railroad." With what a gay front was met this crisis in Branwell's life, that was not recognized as a crisis. In April, simultaneous with Charlotte's writing Wordsworth, he had written Hartley Coleridge a decent letter asking his opinion of two translations of Horace, and of a piece "striving to depict the fall from unguided passion into neglect, despair and death . . . an hour too near those of pleasure, for repentance, and too near death for hope." Fearful forecast. In June, after a delightful day with the brilliant unhappy son of the unhappy brilliant father, Branwell had again written Hartley, in not unmanly but unconsciously pathetic strain: "Sir, you will perhaps have forgotten me, but it will be long before I forget my first

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 206, 217.



conversation with a man of real intellect"—and sent for judgment other translations from Horace. His weakness of character was already apparent; but of Branwell at twenty-two Grundy has said: "What a splendid specimen of brain-power running wild he was! What glorious talent he still had to waste!"<sup>1</sup> With right influences—say, Hartley Coleridge whom he admired and William Weightman whom he loved as a brother—the good might have won its fight against the bad. Unfortunately these influences were lost, or negated, for, as station agent at Sowerby Bridge and still more at Luddenden Foot, Branwell was so grimly and desperately lonely he sought out whomever he could find—and found hard-drinking profligates. Emily was reckless enough in her stern way to understand his recklessness. Even at this early period she feared for him, while feeling helpless. If only Papa had not so long left him to his own devices; if only Papa had not assumed that because he himself had weathered a home-education, his son could; if only they had all less openly idolized him!

The autumn passed not unpleasantly, though Emily failed at her first poem in four months, "The Night Wind":

In summer's mellow midnight,  
A cloudless moon shone through  
Our open parlour window  
And rose trees wet with dew.

I sat in silent musing,  
The soft wind waved my hair;  
It told me Heaven was glorious,  
And sleeping Earth was fair—

and much more of the same sort. The poem is curiously lacking in substance (perhaps because, like the rose-tree out the parlour window, it is fictional) until the last verse:

And when thy heart is laid at rest  
Beneath the church-yard stone  
I shall have time enough to mourn  
And thou to be alone. . . .<sup>2</sup>

Only when the old theme pricked was blood drawn; but that happened too late to save the poem. There followed on September 18 a wretched Gondal effusion. Maybe prose was absorbing Emily at this time; maybe something else. The only certainty is, poetry was getting nothing of her real self.

<sup>1</sup> Grundy, 74.

<sup>2</sup> September 11, 1840.

One November evening Willy Weightman sat in the Parsonage parlour idly sketching a man's and a horse's head. The eye in the horse's head was placed a little too high. But the artist, approving his creations, drew a flying figure of Fame busily inscribing his name on the clouds.<sup>1</sup> Yet Emily liked Willy Weightman. He had gone to see dying Susan Bland and sent without fanfare a bottle of port wine and a jar of preserves;<sup>2</sup> and he was scholarly and genial and honest.

How different some curates Mr. C. for instance (the Mr. Collins of preaching reputation) had grown so savage ("hideous man," Mary Taylor called him) that his wife had burst in upon Papa in his study, asking counsel, and been advised to leave her husband forever.<sup>3</sup> Ah, Emily lived apart from the world; nevertheless she observed the world. And was not the microcosm contained in the microcosm—"heaven in a grain of sand"?

Another winter was whitening on the hills—the first anniversary of Emily's earnest attempt not to be earnest. Tired of the struggle, in February she let down completely, easing her heart by being frankly sad, and so achieved in "The Caged Bird," after months of barrenness, fertility:

And like myself, lone, wholly lone,  
It sees the day's long sunshine glow;  
And like myself it makes its moan  
In unexhausted woe.

Give we the hills our equal prayer:  
Earth's breezy hills and heaven's blue sea;  
I ask for nothing further here  
But my own heart and liberty.

I have sat lonely all the day,  
Watching the drizzling mist descend,  
And first conceal the hills in grey  
And then along the valleys wend.

And I have sat and watched the trees,  
And the sad flowers,—how drear they blow!  
Those flowers were formed to feel the breeze  
Wave their light heads in summer's glow.

Yet their lines passed in gloomy woe,  
And hopeless comes its dark decline,  
And I lament, because I know  
That cold departure pictures mine.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 218.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 217.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I., 219.

<sup>4</sup> February 27, 1841.

It is as if, having lived so long shadowed by a belief in her dark decline, she were lonely when half-converted to merriment.

But this spring was not to be like last spring. It started out the same: the merlins nested on the steepes; and water ouzels lower down, on the beck, among fern and shady bilberry bushes; Ellen came to visit, and Willy Weightman sent valentines. But then Charlotte, after a year and a half of idleness, took a position with Mrs. White of Rawdon, six miles from Bradford; and Anne, not to be outdone, with Mrs. Robinson of Thorp Green near York. That left Emily alone with her father and aunt and "Miss Celia Amelia" and in full possession of the box-room and of the moors; and as if in celebration she wrote one of her best poems, "The Old Stoic":

Riches I hold in light esteem,  
And Love I laugh to scorn;  
And lust of Fame was but a dream,  
That vanished with the morn:

And if I pray, the only prayer  
That moves my lips for me  
Is, 'Leave the heart that now I bear,  
And give me liberty!'

Yes, as my swift days near their goal,  
'Tis all that I implore;—  
In life and death a chainless soul,  
With courage to endure.<sup>1</sup>

Emily's innumerable poems about love, before this and after this, belie that she did or ever could laugh love to scorn, though she may have wished to. But the rest of "The Old Stoic" is Emily—the very Emily—ecstatic and austere—to whom freedom was as necessary as the sustaining air in her lungs. And perhaps, in writing it, she half-remembered from Bewick,

Good times  
And bad times  
And all times  
Get over.

Freedom amid nature. But having what Charlotte called a "proud mind which rebelled at times even against what it most loved," Emily had somewhat neglected nature of late. In her next poem it chided her:

<sup>1</sup> March, 1841.

Shall Earth no more inspire thee,  
 Thou lonely dreamer now?  
 Since passion may not fire thee,  
 Shall nature cease to bow?

Thy mind is ever moving  
 In regions dark to thee;  
 Recall its useless roving,  
 Come back and dwell with me.

I've watched thee every hour;  
 I know my mighty sway;  
 I know my magic power  
 To drive thy griefs away.

Few hearts to mortals given  
 On earth so wild and pine;  
 Yet none would ask a Heaven  
 More like the Earth than thine.

Then let my winds caress thee;  
 Thy comrade let me be:  
 Since nought beside can bless thee,  
 Return and dwell with me.<sup>1</sup>

In spring, with no other comrade, she took again nature that splendid comrade, and was less lonely than when the Parsonage was crowded with people. Many evenings (if not nights) she returned home with her "pallid thick skin" whipped to rose.

Charlotte wrote "Dear E. J." that she was homesick; that she liked Mr. White extremely and was trying hard to like Mrs. White, but the girl of eight and boy of six were "wild and unbroken." When she says, "I received your last letter with delight as usual," a pang goes through posterity, for that letter, like most of Emily's, is dust. Charlotte thanked Emily for sending "packets"; said Anne's last letter contained an assurance that she was well; remarked about Branwell's recent removal to Luddenden Foot: "As you say, it *looks* like getting on at any rate"; and mentioned that Mary Taylor, whose excellent father had died in January, planned to go to New Zealand with her brother Waring—"a strange unlikely-sounding plan." She ended with family matter-of-factness: "With love to Papa, Aunt, Tabby, etc.—Good-bye. C. B." Then: "P.S.—I am very well; I hope you are. Write again soon." In May she relayed the news that Mary's younger sister Martha had gone to finish her education in *Brussels*! And forgetting

<sup>1</sup> May 16, 1841.

that the Pruntys were peasants, and her Uncle Welsh kept a public-house, her Uncle William ran an unsavoury dive of a shebeen, and her Uncle James was a shoemaker,<sup>1</sup> she wrote Ellen that "well could she believe Mrs. W. has been an exciseman's daughter and Mr. W.'s extraction was very low." But Charlotte for all her snobberies had a warm heart, which Emily more and more appreciated. "As you say," Charlotte told the Rev. Henry Nussey, now married, "it is indeed a hard thing for flesh and blood to leave home, especially a *good* home—not a wealthy or splendid one. My home is humble and unattractive to strangers, but to me it contains what I shall find nowhere else in the world—the profound, the intense affection which brothers and sisters feel for each other when their minds are cast in the same mould, their ideas drawn from the same source—when they have clung to each other from childhood, and when disputes have never sprung up to divide them." Emily could have written much the same thing, but could not, holding the secret of her true thoughts, have made the mistake of thinking their minds were "cast in the same mould." She and Charlotte could work together, they might even found a school together—this had been proposed and was being talked about—but she did not fool herself that they were alike. Charlotte continued: "Emily is the only one left at home, where her usefulness and willingness make her indispensable."<sup>2</sup>

Indispensable.

Anne came home for a three-weeks holiday in June, and Charlotte, missing her by a few days, in July. "It feels like Paradise," she wrote Ellen. "But little black Tom" the cat "is dead;—every cup, however sweet has its dregs of bitterness in it. . . . Keeper is as well, big, and grim as ever."<sup>3</sup>

And she might have added, if she had had penetration to discern it, Emily was beginning to lose faith in the cure-all of merriment. This is attested by "Stanzas" about the wind, written July 6, of which the following is an abridgment:

Aye, there it is! It wakes tonight  
Sweet thoughts that will not die;  
And feelings fires flash all as bright  
As in the years gone by!

<sup>1</sup> Mackay, 139, 140.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 225, 232.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 234, 235.

Yes, I could swear that glorious wind  
 Has swept the world aside,  
 Has dashed its memory from thy mind  
 Like foam-bells from the tide:

And thou art now a spirit pouring  
 Thy presence into all:  
 The essence of the Tempest's roaring,  
 And of the Tempest's fall:

A universal influence,  
 From thine own influence free;  
 A principle of life intense,  
 Lost to morality

Nature's deep being, thine shall hold,  
 Her spirit all thy spirit fold,  
 Her breath absorb thy sighs.  
 Mortal! though soon life's tale is told,  
 Who once lives, never dies!

Plainly she is turning from human comforts to the mystic and philosophic comforts of Law Hill days. Though impalpable, they proved for her ravenous heart a substantial nourishment. The belief in immortality which she had held, relinquished, and held again, in this fine poem is firmly stated.

The theme is repeated with sadder and more profoundly human implications, in a poem of July 17, addressed to the earth her "mother":

I see around me tombstones grey  
 Stretching their shadows far away.  
 Beneath the turf my footsteps tread  
 Lie low and lone the silent dead;  
 Beneath the turf, beneath the mould,  
 For ever dark, for ever cold,  
 And my eyes cannot hold the tears  
 That memory hoards from vanished years;  
 For time and death and mortal pain  
 Give wounds that will not heal again.  
 Let me remember half the woe  
 I've seen and heard and felt below,  
 And Heaven itself, so pure and blest,  
 Could never give my spirit rest.  
 Sweet land of light! thy children fair  
 Know nought akin to our despair:  
 Nor have they felt, nor can they tell  
 What tenants haunt each mortal cell,  
 What gloomy guests we hold within,—  
 Torments and madness, tears and sin!

Ah, mother! what shall comfort thee  
For all this boundless misery?

Indeed no dazzling land above  
Can cheat thee of thy children's love.

We struggle still, and strive to trace,  
With clouded gaze, thy darling face.  
We would not leave our native home  
For *any* world beyond the tomb.  
No, rather on thy kindly breast  
Let us be laid in lasting rest;  
Or waken but to share with thee  
A mutual immortality.

This not entirely consistent poem assumes immortality as certain. But personally, she says, she would not be grateful for an immortality which did not preserve, also, the spirit of the good earth—which feelings are pantheistic.

If only in carrying out her compact with Anne to keep a four-yearly "diary" Emily had elected to put her true self into it instead of the spurious self she exhibited to the family! If only her soul were as clear to us as the little pen-and-ink sketches she drew above the 1841 record: one of a young lady (no doubt herself) sitting at a table writing; the other of that same person, full-skirted and beshawled, risen and walking to a window. Nevertheless the following is biographically priceless:

'A PAPER to be opened  
when Anne is  
25 years old,  
or my next birthday after  
if  
all be well.

Emily Jane Brontë. July the 30th, 1841.

"It is Friday evening, near 9 o'clock—wild rainy weather. I am seated in the dining-room alone, having just concluded tidying our desk boxes, writing this document. Papa is in the parlour—Aunt upstairs in her room. She has been reading *Blackwood's Magazine* to Papa. Victoria and Adelaide"—two geese—"are ensconced in the peat-house. Keeper is in the kitchen—Hero"—a hawk—"in his cage. We are all stout and hearty, as I hope is the case with Charlotte, Branwell, and Anne"—whereupon she tells where each is.

"A scheme is at present in agitation for setting us up in a school of our own; as yet nothing is determined, but I hope and trust it may go on and prosper and answer our highest expectations. This day four years I wonder whether we shall still be dragging on in our present condition or established to our heart's content. Time will show.

"I guess that at the time appointed for the opening of this paper we *i.e.* Charlotte, Anne, and I, shall be all merrily seated in our own sitting-room in some pleasant and flourishing seminary, having just gathered in for the midsummer holyday. Our debts will be paid off, and we shall have cash in hand to a considerable amount. Papa, Aunt, and Branwel will either have been or be coming to see us. It will be a fine warm summer evening, very different from this bleak look-out and Anne and I will perchance slip out into the garden for a few minutes to peruse our papers. I hope either this or something better will be the case.

"The Gondalians are at present in a threatening state, but there is no open rupture as yet. All the princes and princesses of the Royalty are at the Palace of Instruction. I have a good many books on hand, but I am sorry to say that as usual I make small progress with any. However, I have just made a new regularity paper! And I mean VERB SAP to do great things. And now I must close, sending from far an exhortation, 'Courage, courage,' to exiled and harassed Anne, wishing she was here."<sup>1</sup>

Emily's enthusiasm over the idea of founding a school was genuine only because she felt she ought to contribute to the earning-power of the family, and teaching at home was better than "going out." "I hardly knew," Charlotte had written Ellen on hearing that Mary's and Ellen's brothers objected to their sisters becoming governesses, "that it was such a degradation till lately."<sup>2</sup> But for a long time Emily had *felt* it a degradation.

Anne's paper, written simultaneously, repeats much the same information and hopes. Like Charlotte she is quick to defend Emily: "All are doing something for our livelihood except Emily, who, however, is as busy as any of us, and in reality earns her food and raiment as much as we do." She quotes, for the future:

How little know we what we are  
How less what we may be?

In mentioning the various pets, who were Emily's especial

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 238.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 234.



care, she says the wild goose flew away and one of the three tame geese was killed. Of herself she says: "I have the same faults that I had then," four years ago, "only I have more wisdom and experience, and a little more self-possession than I then enjoyed. . . . For some years I have looked upon 25 as a sort of era in my existence. It may prove a true presentiment, or it may be only a superstitious fancy; the latter seems most likely, but"—using Emily's phrase—"time will show." Of the Gondalians, whom Emily had touched on: "I wonder whether the Gondalians will still be flourishing" four years hence "and what will be their condition. I am now engaged in writing the fourth volume of Solala Vernon's Life."<sup>1</sup>

They were playing at the Gondals, but for Anne the game was less alive than when she was younger and reality had not sneered at her make-believe. Even Emily's two Gondal poems of this summer, "Geraldine" of August 17 and "Rosina" of September 1, are as dead as branches out of which the sap has run and the moisture dried.

She wrote no other poems all summer, all autumn, all winter. Why? Because in making a last desperate effort to be jolly and escape ruin she was so crucifying her real nature no poems could come from the victim? Or because she was secretly writing prose and it soaked up all of her, like blotting-paper a fluid? Or because the prosaic discussion about founding a school turned the world prosaic? Or all of these reasons? Or none of them? It is foolish to conjecture. For eight months Emily wrote only two arid Gondal poems. But wild ducks passed over, in the autumn; and on the wavy moors crowds of bees swarmed and droned in the heather; and on October 27, 1841, Emily finished a water-colour drawing, 8½ by 10 inches,<sup>2</sup> of her pet merlin-hawk Hero: alone, standing on a bleak bough high in air, but looking out alert, one curled claw lifted. The bird is well executed, and has a proud austere bearing beautifully symbolic of Emily's own essential spirit.

When the projected school had been vaunted and attacked a hundred times, and Aunt's savings hinted at as most desirable for remodelling the Parsonage or setting up elsewhere, say at Dewsbury, suddenly Charlotte dropped the idea like a hot coal and passionately seized on another—perhaps because of a "very handsome black silk scarf and a pair of beautiful kid gloves" sent from Brussels in

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 239.

<sup>2</sup> Museum. Also, see frontispiece.

August by Mary Taylor (who had joined Martha), along with a glowing description of "pictures the most exquisite and cathedrals the most venerable." Charlotte hinted about Brussels to Ellen: "I hardly know what swelled to my throat . . . such a vehement impatience of restraint and steady work. Such a strong wish for wings—wings such as wealth can furnish—such an urgent thirst to see—to know—to learn—something internal seemed to expand boldly for a minute—I was tantalized with the consciousness of faculties unexercised—then all collapsed and I despaired."<sup>1</sup> But not for long. In September Charlotte dispatched a strategic letter to Aunt Elizabeth Branwell, the lady with the purse, suggesting, anticipating, counter-attacking, wangling; pointing out that with a continental polishing-off "only for a single half-year" she and Emily "could take a footing in the world afterwards which we can never do now." She continued: "I feel certain . . . that you will see the propriety of what I say . . . you are not fond of making shabby purchases; when you do confer a favour, it is often done in style; and depend upon it £50 or £100, thus laid out, would be well employed. Of course, I know no other friend in the world to whom I could apply . . . except yourself. . . . Papa will perhaps think it a wild and ambitious scheme; but who ever rose in the world without ambition? When he left Ireland to go to Cambridge University, he was as ambitious as I am now. I want us all to go on. I know we have talents, and I want them to be turned to account. I look to you, Aunt, to help us. I think you will not refuse. I know, if you consent, it will not be my fault if you ever repent of your kindness. With love to all, and the hope that you are all well,—Believe me, dear Aunt, your affectionate niece, Charlotte."<sup>2</sup> Was not this masterly?

Aunt consented to make the loan.

Whereupon many letters on the subject of Brussels flew to Hawthorne—one to "Dear E. J." in which Charlotte doublecrossed "dear Aunt": "Before our half-year in Brussels is completed, you and I will have to seek employment abroad. It is not my intention to retrace my steps home till twelvemonth. . . ." To Ellen she wrote: "Brussels is still my promised land, but there is still the wilderness of time and space to cross before I reach it. I am not likely, I think, to go to the Château de Kockleberg"—the

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 240.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 242, 243.

Taylor's school. "I have heard of a less expensive establishment." But later: "Papa received an unfavourable account from Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins of the French Schools in Brussels;" so Lille in northern France was suggested. But they settled on Brussels, after all; and when Charlotte arrived home Christmas eve (after a touching scene with the Whites of low extraction) she and Emily fell to making "lots of chemises—nightgowns—pocket handkerchiefs and pockets."<sup>1</sup> They had not had such an exciting Christmas in years.

It was further enhanced by the way "his young reverence" Willy Weightman, sitting opposite Anne in church, "sighed softly and looked out of the corner of his eyes to win her attention."

This young man had come to be a symbol, to Emily, of the light heart she had hoped to attain. She looked at him narrowly now: at the blue eyes, the auburn hair, the cheeks which had always been rosy. Levity was a mirage: in her terrible thirst she had found it dry of water. And Willy Weightman—why, he himself, merriment's supreme exponent, was not so bonny and bubbling—had grown sad-looking and pale.<sup>2</sup>

To what could she turn now?

She leafed over the *Book of Common Prayer*<sup>3</sup> which Charlotte had given her the first of February.<sup>4</sup>

How beautiful the prose was!

"Almighty and most merciful Father; we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and there is no health in us. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders . . ."

She wrote her name on the fly-leaf: "Emily Jane Brontë."

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 246-250.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 228, 250.

<sup>3</sup> Museum.

<sup>4</sup> Miss Outhwaite had given Anne a *Book of Common Prayer* February 13, 1827, and no doubt there was at least one other copy in the house, but it must have seemed quite different, to Emily, to possess one of her own.



Emily Brontë's pencil-sketch of a pine-tree in the garden of the *Pensionnat Heger*, Brussels.

(*Harcorth Parsonage Museum.*)



## XXIV

### MIRAGE OF LEARNING

IN the cold of February Emily and Charlotte, accompanied by Papa and Mary Taylor and her brother Joe, set out for Brussels.

It was Emily's first real travelling adventure; her first train trip; her first so many things. She looked out of a square of blurred window-glass at changing England, the taller elms and more fertile fields as they sped south; houses with feathers and plumes of smoke. Then porters were bellowing in Euston Station. Papa told the cabman, "Chapter Coffee House, Paternoster Square," who replied in Cockney as strange to their ears as their strong Irish-Yorkshire to his. The chop-chop of the horses' hooves was the loud beating of her heart. The carriage swayed and lurched over pavements cobbled in the reign of Queen Elizabeth.

"In London for the first time: tired with travelling; confused with darkness; palsied with cold. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

The Chapter Coffee House was a curious, warped, low-ceiled, brown tavern habited for the most part by denizens of the book-trade. That night Emily lay in a strange room, her head on a strange pillow. She had just extinguished the candle when she heard the slow-booming deliberate great bell of St. Paul's Cathedral—twelve strokes, each trailed by a deep sweet hum of reverberation;<sup>2</sup> and thought of that lonely bell swinging in that lonely tower. . . .

The next morning, refreshed, the little party set out to see the sights of London: the galleries full of pictures and statues, Westminster, and the Halls of Parliament. Charlotte said they ought to be thorough, now they had the opportunity; Emily—as Mary Taylor recorded years later—"was like her in these habits of mind, but certainly never took her opinion, but always had one to offer. . . ."<sup>3</sup> To paraphrase slightly a description in *Villette*, "they saw and felt London at last: they got into the Strand; they went up Cornhill; they mixed with the life passing along; they dared the perils of crossings . . . the city seemed so much in earnest; its business; its rush, its roar, were such serious things, sights and sounds. . . . At the West End you may be amused, but in the city you are deeply excited. . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Villette*, 48.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>3</sup> Gaskell, 220.

Finding themselves before St. Paul's, they went in; they mounted to the dome; they saw thence London, with its river, its bridges, and its churches; they saw antique Westminster, and the grey Temple Gardens, with the sun upon them, and a glad, blue sky of February above; and, between them and it, not too dense a cloud of haze. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

That night they boarded a packet in mid-Thames, seeing the black sea through darkness, as at Silverdale in their childhood . . . but the thrashing of the waves sounded louder because invisible. The boat tossed on the water and Emily on her berth; till the sun came up bright—they were heading straight into it—and there by the shore, with a painted town behind, were hundreds of fishing-smacks laced with rigging; some with white sails furled, others with white sails spread like the wings of birds. . . .

Arriving in fabulous Brussels the second night, they slept at an inn; and the next morning, having said good-bye to Mary and Joe, accompanied Mr. Jenkins, Chaplain of the British Embassy, to the *Pensionnat Héger*, at 32 Rue d'Isabelle, an ancient three-storied building flush with the street; and were ushered through a black-and-white paved passage into an unheated salon with a polished floor, walls painted to imitate marble, furniture covered with white drapes, gilt ornaments, and an unlit green porcelain stove. A large lustre hung from the ceiling. A clock was ticking on the mantelpiece. Presently a pair of white folding doors with gold moulding yawned open, and Madame Héger *la directrice* appeared: a "motherly, dumpy little woman," wearing something from her wardrobe of ill-fitting "rather suspicious splendour"; decorous and wise and—as Emily and Charlotte were to learn—passionless, prying and faithless. Madame Héger spoke French, the Brontës English, and everyone gesticulated. Then Mr. Brontë kissed his two daughters (or so we presume) and, with a plan in his head to see a bit of France before turning homeward, departed.<sup>2</sup>

The new situation was at once provocative and troubling. Charlotte and Emily were impressed by the shining quality of the air and the unflecked blue of the Belgian sky. But everything was alien: their two beds, curtained off at the end of a row of twenty dormitory beds; the *oratoire*, a grey-shadowed room where a crucifix hung pale against a dark

<sup>1</sup> *Villette*, 51.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 251-253; *Villette*, 69, 70.

wall between two vigilant candles; the rear garden full of rose bushes, pear trees and a large vine-draped *berceau*, now leafless; the sixty-odd *internes* and twenty-odd *externes*, ruddy stupid Belgian girls on an average ten years younger than themselves; Mademoiselle Blanche, Mademoiselle Sophie, and Mademoiselle Marie, the governesses; though not, perhaps, Monsieur Constantin Héger, Professor of Rhetoric (at the Athénée Royal on the next street as well as at the *Pensionnat*) and Macame's husband: "a man of power as to mind, but very choleric and irritable as to temper; a little black ugly being, "who sometimes borrowed the lineaments of an insane tom-cat, sometimes those of a delirious hyena; occasionally, but very seldom, discarding those perilous attractions for an air not above 100 degrees removed from mild and gentlemanlike. . . ." Everything came on them so fast, the two girls were bewildered. They took walks into the country to clear their heads. "At the top of every hill," Charlotte said, "you see something." <sup>1</sup>

But to Emily no landscape not the moors of Yorkshire could be beautiful. Years later Charlotte wrote of Emily: "After the age of twenty, having meanwhile studied alone with diligence and perseverance, she went with me to an establishment on the Continent. The same suffering and conflict ensued, heightened by the strong recoil of her upright, heretic, and English spirit from the gentle Jesuitry of the foreign and Romish system. Once more she seemed sinking, but this time she rallied through the mere force of resolution: with inward remorse and shame she looked back on her former failure, and resolved to conquer, but the victory cost her dear. She was never happy till she carried her hard-won knowledge back to the remote English village, the remote Parsonage house, and desolate Yorkshire hills." <sup>2</sup>

The truth is, Emily had a new hope, sprung up where the old hope had died. If she could not forget in gaiety, perhaps she could in erudition. To know a great deal must set one in a quiet place, out of the reach of fiends. . . .

So she worked like a horse, Charlotte has said; adding in justice, "she had great difficulties to contend with, far greater than I. . . ." For unlike Charlotte, Emily knew no French, and the courses were adapted to natives, not foreigners. But Emily attacked the new language so fiercely Monsieur Héger was astonished at her brilliant French

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 260; Gaskell, 220; *The Professor*, *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Introduction to *Selections from Poems by Ellis Bell*.



*devoirs*. Watching her gaunt odd figure in straight-hanging dresses with ungainly leg-of-mutton sleeves, he perceived that though Charlotte had talent Emily had genius. Thus the Haworth villagers who had always considered Emily “’t cleverest o’ t’ Brontë childer”<sup>1</sup> were at last upheld by someone eminently capable of judging. Years later Monsieur Héger told Mrs. Gaskell that the younger sister had a head for logic unusual in a man and rare indeed in a woman; but that this gift was impaired by a stubborn tenacity of will which made her invulnerable to all reasoning if it blocked her wishes or sense of right. M. Héger’s opinion is valuable as that of the only first-class male mind with which Emily ever came into direct contact. She was not afraid of his black moustaches but came back at him obstinately, giving ire for ire. Her imagination was so vivid she could impose upon anyone who listened any scene or set of characters she chose to create; and M. Héger thought, after she was dead, how marvellously she would have reconstructed the past if she had elected to write histories. “She should have been a man,” he declared—“a great navigator. Her powerful reason would have deduced new spheres of discovery from the knowledge of the old; and her strong, imperious will would never have been daunted by opposition or difficulty; never have given way but with life.”<sup>2</sup>

As a tribute to his two superior pupils, this professor proposed a new method of teaching whereby he would read French masterpieces to them, such as Casimir de la Vigne’s poem on the death of Joan of Arc, to give them an impression of the whole, and they would then analyze the parts for strengths and weaknesses. In this way he hoped they would get into the swing of some noble style and adopt it for their own. Well, he asked, did they like the plan? No, Emily spoke up; she saw no good to be derived from it; she, for one, was not anxious to lose all originality of thought and expression. And Miss Charlotte? Did she prefer the old grounding in grammar, syntax, and vocabulary? Charlotte said she doubted the success of the plan, but would do whatever M. Héger, who, after all, was her teacher, thought best. Perhaps it was from episodes like this that the exacting and somewhat egotistical little professor got the idea that Emily was egotistical and exacting.<sup>3</sup>

As the ancient enormous pear trees blossomed and the

<sup>1</sup> Robinson, 71.

<sup>2</sup> Gaskell, 227.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

parterre of roses put out first red tufts and then green fish-shaped leaves and long suckers, Charlotte and Emily observed, walking in the "*allée défendue*," that spring is lovely anywhere. But they did not become vagrants in the soft air; if anything they worked harder, Emily especially, at the stubborn diplomatic French language, the guttural German one, and music and drawing. Only when their lungs absolutely demanded a little clean oxygen did they take a look at Rue Villa Hermosa, the reputed site of the forty-foot wall erected by early settlers to keep out the giants Jan and Jannika; and the Belgian first-king of Jerusalem, marble, on a marble horse which seemed to move; and the gay crowds milling in the cobbled Grande Place and Rue Royale; and the fourteenth-century, smoke-coated, figure-crusted Town Hall; and then—after climbing a hill—the huge gothic Cathedral of St. Gudule, full of cloying-sweet smells distributed from a golden censer. . . . The old part of Brussels was all hills, up and down and up. They returned to the *Pensionnat* tired; but intrigued by the Rue d'Isabella too, that had its ghosts, being the old thirteenth-century Fosse-aux-Chiens where ducal hounds had crouched in their kennels, and, later, a hospital succoured the naked, hungry, and leprous, and, still later, an aristocratic guild devoted to the noble art of cross-bow shooting held a great annual match, awarding to the victor—in 1615 the beloved Infanta Isabella herself—a jewelled decoration. Charlotte and Emily recited their lessons in what had once been a ballroom teeming with black Spaniards and fair Flemings, in the great square arch-ducal mansion which Isabella built for the guild as compensation for having a street cut through its sunny shooting-ground! . . .<sup>1</sup> Brussels was so old, and spring so young—or was it? Spring had been coming to this same place, in the same way, a long time. . . .

On March 27 Emily wrote a sad poem about finding a lost ring, "a mute remembrancer of crime"—whatever that means—which is poetically unimportant, except for two charming lines:

What winter floods, what streams of spring  
Have drenched the grass by night and day!

Spring was the season in which love had come to her four years ago, and with love, shame; and the amatory couples which every spring raises up in parks and by-ways reminded

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 221–225; private research in Brussels.

her of these things; and in particular, it seems, a black-haired man loitering with a girl—like those two in the “lone green glade” long ago:

In the same place, when nature wore  
The same celestial glow,  
I'm sure I've seen these forms before  
But many springs ago.

. . . . .

Besides, I've dreamt of tears whose traces  
Will never more depart;  
Of agony that fast effaces  
The verdure of the heart

—even over the water, a continent removed. Then, for the hundredth time since the sorrowful day in the lone green glade when her kiss was actually or figuratively refused, she wrings comfort from fancying that she is dying—this time in a far country—and her love is sorry:

I dreamt one sunny day like this,  
In this peerless month of May,  
I saw her give th' unanswered kiss  
As his spirit passed away.

. . . . .

Then she upon the covered grave,  
The grass-grown grave, did lie:  
A tomb not girt by English wave  
Nor arched by English sky.<sup>1</sup>

But this is meagre comfort, and suddenly the old shame follows the old love in her heart:

O innocence, that cannot live  
With heart-wrung anguish long,—  
Dear childhood's innocence, forgive,  
For I have done thee wrong! . . .<sup>1</sup>

After that she did not write poetry for many months, for she was cramming her head with knowledge. What did learning have to do with poetry—as what, with her unhappy love? She wished the two to be divorced, having chosen learning, the mercifully dry and impersonal. She was all but unapproachable these days. If her lessons required her to speak, she spoke—otherwise not. Mrs. Jenkins ceased to invite them to spend Sundays and holidays with her because Emily obviously did not enjoy it.<sup>2</sup>

But the two young women occasionally saw their friends

<sup>1</sup> May 17, 1842.

<sup>2</sup> Gaskell, 221.

the Taylors at the Château de Kockleberg; from whence, late in March, a composite letter was dispatched to Ellen Nussey. Mary Taylor was in a humorous mood. "Fortunately," she wrote, "the weather is too wet for us to go to Church"; and proceeded to take off her professors. The dancing master "has the faults of a French puppy. . . . I can't put out my feet—Allongez!—plus long!—more! All my awkwardnesses, however, are thrown into the shade by those of a Belgian girl who does not know right foot from left, and obstinately dances with her mouth open. . . ." Charlotte contributed: "We are spending the day with Mary and Martha Taylor—to us such a happy day—for one's blood requires a little warming, it gets cold with living against strangers. You are not forgotten as you feared you would be. . . . Mary and Martha are not changed; I have a catholic faith in them that they cannot change. Good-bye. . . ." Fun-loving Martha added: "Mary is on the other side of me, staring into a German dictionary, and looking as fierce as a tiger. . . . Would you like to be cracking your head with French and German?" Then Mary scribbled a postscript; and Martha another: "It is all the fashion for gentlemen to paint themselves. Shall I send you some paint for George?"—Ellen's brother. "When you see my brother Joe, have the kindness to pull his hair right well for me and give John a good pinch. . . ." <sup>1</sup> All five of these high-spirited communications were squeezed on to one large sheet of notepaper. Emily added not a line. It is significant that she was the only one in that group who would not connive.

Charlotte's uncollaborating letters are sprinkled with interesting remarks: "I was twenty-six years old a week or two since"—Emily was almost twenty-four—"and at this ripe time of life I am a schoolgirl, a complete schoolgirl, and, on the whole, very happy in that capacity. . . . It is natural to me to submit, and very unnatural to command. . . ." But "the difference in country and religion makes a broad line of demarcation between us and all the rest. We are completely isolated in the midst of numbers. . . . Emily and I have had good health, and therefore we have been able to work well. . . . M. Héger is very angry with me at present, because I have written a translation which he chose to stigmatise as *peu correcte*. He did not tell me so, but wrote the accusation on the margin of my book, and asked in

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 256-259.

brief, stern phrase, how it happened that my compositions were always better than my translations? adding that the thing seemed to him inexplicable. The fact is, some weeks ago, in high-flown humour, he forbade me to use either dictionary or grammar in translating the most difficult English compositions into French. This makes the task rather arduous, and compels me now and then to introduce an English word, which nearly plucks the eyes out of his head when he sees it. Emily and he don't draw well together at all. When he is very ferocious with me I cry; that sets all straight. . . . Brussels is a beautiful city. The Belgians hate the English. Their external morality is more rigid than ours. To lace the stays without a handkerchief on the neck is considered a disgusting piece of delicacy." . . .<sup>1</sup>

All this was transmitted in May. In July without stopping for breath she dashed off: "I consider it doubtful whether I shall come home in September or not—Madame Héger has made a proposal for both me and Emily to stay another half year—offering to dismiss her English master and take me as English teacher—also to employ Emily some part of each day as in teaching music to a certain number of pupils—for these services we are to be allowed to continue our studies in French and German—and have board without paying for it—no salaries however are offered—the proposal is kind and in a great selfish city like Brussels and a great selfish school containing nearly ninety pupils (boarders and day-pupils included) implies a degree of interest which demands gratitude in return—I am inclined to accept it—what think you?" Then, "Emily is making rapid progress. . . . Monsieur and Madame Héger begin to recognize the valuable points of her character under her singularities. . . . If the national character of the Belgians is to be measured by the character of most of the girls in the school, it is a character singularly cold, selfish, animal and inferior—They are besides very mutinous and difficult for the teachers to manage—and their principles are rotten to the core—we avoid them—which is not difficult to do—as we have the brand of Protestantism and Anglicism upon us." There follows some advice to any "so besotted as to turn Catholic," to "note well the mummeries thereof—also the idiotic, mercenary aspect of *all* the priests." This opinion is in line with Mary Taylor's:

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 260, 261.

"They practise civility, *i.e.* tell lies till it is only the very wise ones among them that know what the truth is, and they take good care not to tell it."<sup>1</sup>

One day this July M. Héger read to Charlotte and Emily Victor Hugo's famous portrait of Mirabeau. With perspicuity he pointed out that the fault in Hugo's style was exaggeration in conception and the virtue, beauty of emotional nuances. The young ladies were then invited to choose a subject for a similar portrait. "It is necessary," he said, "before sitting down to write on a subject, to have thoughts and feelings about it. I cannot tell on what subject your heart and mind have been excited. I must leave that to you." The method was good; for Emily's least prepossessing composition was on an assigned subject, *L'Amour Filial*. This time Charlotte chose Pierre the Hermit; Emily, Harold on the eve of the battle of Hastings. As Mrs. Gaskell (who was prejudiced against Emily) admitted years later: "Emily's *devoir* is superior to Charlotte's in power and in imagination, and fully equal to it in language"—this when, as a hazard, Emily had been allowed to use neither dictionary nor grammar! The excellence of M. Héger's criticism is proved by his dictum: "When you are writing, place your argument first in cool, prosaic language; but when you have thrown the reins on the neck of your imagination, do not pull her up to reason." Later he promoted them to a kind of synthetic method, by reading various authors on one person or event. How did they differ? he asked. Was the difference explainable by the character and position of the author? Cromwell, for instance. Bossuet in the "*Oraison Funèbre de la Reine d'Angleterre*" presented Cromwell as a preordained carrier-out of God's plan; Guizot as a man endowed with free-will but actuated solely by expediency; Carlyle as a man of conscience, but not preordained. "Now," he would say, "sift out the elements of truth and join them into a convincing whole."<sup>2</sup>

This same July, about a month before the beginning of the *grandes vacances*, the daughters of a Dr. Wheelwright of London matriculated at the *Pensionnat*. The first time Charlotte saw the eldest, fourteen-year-old Laetitia, she was standing bolt upright in the classroom, surveying with a half-contemptuous air the gauche Belgian girls. "It was so very English," thought Charlotte. What Emily thought is not known. But since suspicion breeds suspicion, it seems

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 266, 267, 269.

<sup>2</sup> Gaskell, 231-237.

probable that she did not like the Wheelwrights—for certainly the Wheelwrights disliked her extremely; which is partially explained by the fact that Emily taught the three younger sisters music during the five-to-six recreation period when they longed to be frolicking in the garden with the other girls; and conceived it her duty to be stern. The Wheelwrights stayed at the *Pensionnat* for a month as boarders, while their parents took a trip up the Rhine; then removed to a flat in Hotel Clusyenaar on the Rue Royale and became day-pupils.<sup>1</sup>

But everyone did not dislike Emily. A sixteen-year-old Belgian girl of her own class, Mademoiselle de Bassompierre, considered her superior in every way to Charlotte—kinder, more sympathetic, more approachable; and all her life treasured a present of an original drawing, by Emily, of a great broken pine tree in the school garden.<sup>2</sup> The shadows of the far-spreading branches are meticulously done, but with spirit, as if, while observing and sketching, Emily entered into the essential nature of those shadows.<sup>3</sup>

By now the daily routine was as familiar and unconsciously-performed as breathing. Charlotte and Emily, in the second of the three classes, sat side by side on the last row, in the quietest corner, so deeply absorbed in their lessons, Mrs. Gaskell says on the authority of Laetitia Wheelwright, as to be insensible to noise or movement. From nine to twelve the pupils studied and recited; at noon ate bread and fruit at a long table in the *réfectoire* under a hanging oil-lamp; from one to two did fancy work while listening to a pupil read light literature; from two to four, lessons again; after which, the *externes* having departed, the *internes* dined in the *réfectoire* under the eagle eyes of Monsieur and Madame Héger; from five to six, recreation, within smelling distance of a thick-planted copse of lilacs, laburnum and acacias, while the Brontës walked arm in arm, in silence; from six to seven, study; after which, the dreaded *lecture pieuse*; at eight, a light meal of *pistolets*, delicious little brown Brussels rolls, and water; then prayers; then bed. Charlotte and Emily slept draped round with white curtains; extracted their clothes from drawers underneath the beds; and for bathing, resorted to a ewer and basin, with a looking-glass hung above. Emily did not use the looking-glass much. Whatever she was, she was not vain. On chilly days the girls did needlework in the pictur-

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 255.    <sup>2</sup> Museum.    <sup>3</sup> Chadwick, 227, 228.

esque old "Galerie" or theatre at the back of the garden, sitting before a large open fireplace bearing an iron coat-of-arms dated 1525.<sup>1</sup>

Then the long vacation began and Charlotte's and Emily's footsteps echoed through empty halls. But the Wheelwrights continued their lessons at the *Pensionnat*; and though Martha had gone to England in June, Mary was still available for excursions into the country; and the Dixons, cousins of the Taylors, welcomed both Charlotte and Emily to their town-house, though the first was shy and the second impenetrable. Mary Taylor wrote Ellen on September 24: "Charlotte and Emily are well; not only in health but in mind and hope. They are content with their present position and even gay and I think they do quite right not to return to England . . . It is a matter of taste and feeling, and I think you feel pent up enough where you are to see why they are right in staying outside the cage—though it is somewhat cold. Cold or warm, farewell. I am going to shut my eyes for a cold plunge"—meaning her proposed trip to a place near Iserlohn in the heart of Germany—"when I come up again I'll tell you all what it's like."<sup>2</sup>

Neither Mary as she made high-spirited plans, nor Charlotte and Emily as they pursued knowledge in deserted rooms and roamed museums, had the foresight to reckon with death. Who has such foresight?

It was wonderful to see the originals of famous paintings, instead of mean reproductions. Charlotte said she wished she could visit all the cities of Europe and see all the sights; and no doubt Emily had moments of exuberance—of believing, almost, that knowledge could and would cure the heart of its longing; that diffusion of experience liberated. But death is disrespectful of all such notions.

Willy Weightman, little recking what a long procession he led, was the first to go. He had brought so much gaiety with him when he came, and now took so much gaiety with him when he went. Though Charlotte and Emily did not know it for weeks afterward, he died September 6; Mr. Brontë preaching his funeral sermon in Haworth Church October 2. "His character wore well," said Mr. Brontë; "the surest proof of real worth. . . ." Branwell wrote his friend Francis Grundy on October 25, in explanation of a

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 240-242, and Notes.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 272; 274, Note; Gaskell, 239.



protracted silence: "I have had a long attendance at the death-bed of the Rev. Mr. Weightman, one of my dearest friends. . . ." Charlotte and Emily must have received the sorrowful news with incredulity. Miss Celia Amelia, who sent valentines . . . who laughed and joked and was a little vain and incurably amorous and unfailingly generous . . . who, only eight months ago, in February, had flirted with Anne, in Church, out of the corner of his eye. . . . Ah, but he had looked wan and thin, they remembered now . . . but who would have thought that in eight months . . . who would have thought . . . ?<sup>1</sup>

Emily was too sensitive not to be profoundly affected by William Weightman's death. She brooded on his particular death and on death in general. "In the midst of life we are in death. . . ." But her *Book of Common Prayer* contained other words: "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. . . ." It quoted Job: "And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. . . ." It said: "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the Lord. . . ." Emily could not have read such words without a feeling of tears: "Lord, let me know mine end, and the number of my days. . . . Behold, thou hast made my days as it were a span long: and mine age is even as nothing in respect of thee; and verily every man living is altogether vanity. For man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain. . . . For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday: seeing that is past as a watch in the night. As soon as thou scatterest them they are even as a sleep; and fade away suddenly like the grass. . . ." Oh, it was beautiful, beautiful. Emily was not one to care about relative matters once she caught a glimpse of absolute ones. That was what death did: it made studying and reciting seem trivial and foolish. *Je parle, tu parle, il parle, nous parlons*—well, and what of it? Willy Weightman was in his grave.

The weird tales of E. A. T. Hoffman the German romanticist, whom Emily was reading as part of her German course, fitted perfectly into this mood.

On October 23<sup>2</sup> while thinking on death and her "guilt" she wrote a poem called "Self-Interrogation." Willy

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 272.

<sup>2</sup> Copied February 1, 1843.

Weightman's unexpected death seemed to prefigure her own: she seemed already in the evening of life:

The evening passes fast away,  
'Tis almost time to rest;  
What thoughts has left the vanished day?  
What feelings in thy breast?

The vanished day? It leaves a sense  
Of labour hardly done;  
Of little gained with vast expense—  
A sense of grief alone!

Time stands before the door of Death,  
Upbraiding bitterly;  
And Conscience, with exhaustless breath,  
Pours black reproach on me:

And though I've said that Conscience lies,  
And Time should false condemn;  
Still, sad Repentance clouds my eyes,  
And makes me yield to them!

Then art thou glad to seek repose?  
Art glad to leave the sea,  
And anchor all thy weary woes  
In calm eternity?

Nothing regrets to see thee go—  
Not one voice sobs "Farewell";  
And where thy heart has suffered so,  
Canst thou desire to dwell?

Alas! the countless links are strong  
That bind us to our clay;  
The loving spirit lingers long,  
And would not pass away!

And rest is sweet, when laurelled fame  
Will crown the soldier's crest;  
But a brave heart, with a tarnished name,  
Would rather fight than rest.

Well, thou hast fought for many a year,  
Hast fought thy whole life through,  
Hast humbled Falsehood, trampled fear;  
What is there left to do?

'Tis true, this arm has hotly striven,  
Has dared what few would dare;  
Much have I done, and freely given,  
But little learnt to bear!

Look on the grave where thou must sleep,  
Thy last, and strongest foe;  
It is endurance not to weep  
If that repose seem woe.

The long war closing in defeat—  
Defeat serenely borne,—  
Thy midnight rest may still be sweet,  
And break in glorious morn!

This poem is highly important as autobiography. It shows that her experiment with learning had failed, whether altogether because death rose up and spoiled it, or partially because, her temperament balking, it was bound to fail after the first flush of interest and hope. She is thinking in the old terms, lamenting the old "crime," celebrating the old punishment: "conscience . . . pours black reproach on me." She half shudders at, half invites, death as the only solution to the insoluble cause of her "tarnished name." But in this mood she does not repeat that there is immortality; the most she can say is, there may be. . . .

And then Martha followed Willy Weightman, as girls had always followed him—pretty, prankish, dancing Martha. Returning from England she suddenly fell ill at Kockleberg of the same mysterious illness as Willy Weightman,<sup>1</sup> and though Mary nursed her with steadfast devotion, seemed in haste to be on her way. Charlotte (and perhaps Emily) went to Kockleberg one morning to inquire and were told she had died in the night; and Mary wrote Ellen October 30: "A thousand times I have reviewed the minutest circumstances of it, but I cannot without great difficulty give a regular account of them. There is nothing to regret, nothing to recall—not even Martha. She is better where she is. But when I recall the sufferings which have purified her, my heart aches—I can't help it, and every trivial accident, sad or pleasant, reminds me of her and of what she went through. . . . I am going with Charlotte and Emily to the Protestant cemetery this afternoon. It is long since I have seen them, and we shall have much to say to each other." In a postscript she added: "Well, I have seen her and Emily. We have walked about six miles to see the cemetery and the country round it. We then spent a pleasant evening with my cousins, and in the presence of my uncle and Emily, one not speaking at all, the other once or twice."<sup>2</sup> In after-time Charlotte wrote of Martha in the person of Jessy Yorke: "He has no idea that little Jessy will die young, she is so gay, and chattering, and arch—original even now; passionate when provoked, but most affectionate if caressed; by turns gentle and rattling;

<sup>1</sup> Appendicitis ?

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 232, 272, 274, 275, 282.

exacting yet generous; fearless. . . . Yet reliant on anyone who will help her. Jessy, with her piquant little face, engaging prattle, and winning ways, is made to be a pet. . . . Much loved she was, much loving. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

While Charlotte and Emily walked sadly in the Protestant Cemetery that Sunday afternoon at the end of October, another whom they loved lay dead—Aunt Branwell. Indeed she was scarcely cold yet, for, had they but known it, she had died only the day before, of "internal obstruction." Branwell noted her illness on October 25. to Francis Grundy: "I am attending at the death-bed of my Aunt, who has been for twenty years as my mother. I expect her to die in a few hours." But she lingered on four days; till Branwell wrote: "I am incoherent, I fear, but I have been waking two nights witnessing such agonizing suffering as I would not wish my worst enemy to endure; and I have now lost the guide and director of all the happy days connected with my childhood."<sup>2</sup>

Letters were a long time in transit in 1842, and Charlotte and Emily did not even hear of Aunt's illness till November 2. They decided to go home at once. But before they could pack a newly-purchased trunk of black wood strengthened with iron bands and with an arched top lined with blue flowered paper<sup>3</sup>—they heard Aunt was dead. The first boat they could catch was from Antwerp on Sunday the 6th. They travelled day and night (the Channel was a blur, London a blur, the English countryside swimming past and the stations, blurs), reaching Haworth Tuesday morning—so to speak, out of breath.<sup>4</sup>

Anne was at home, and Papa, and Branwell. Only Aunt was not there. She had gone to the overcrowded graveyard in her discreet silk dress. But the large bonnet trimmed with ruching which she always wore when she went out, she had not worn it. On the table lay her gold snuff-box, the one she used to offer to the girls, with a laugh.

The day they left Brussels M. Héger had written Mr. Brontë eulogizing his daughters: "A very sad event has suddenly called your daughters to England. Their departure, which causes us much sorrow, has my entire approbation. . . . You will no doubt learn with pleasure that your daughters have made very remarkable progress in all branches of teaching, and that this progress is entirely

<sup>1</sup> *Shirley*, Chap. IX.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 272, 273.

<sup>3</sup> *Museum*.

<sup>4</sup> Gaskell, 247.

owing to their love of work and their perseverance. With such pupils we have had little to do; their advancement is your work more than ours. . . . In losing our two dear pupils we cannot hide the fact of our own sadness and uneasiness; we are sorely pained that this sudden separation comes to sever an affection almost paternal. . . . In a year each of your daughters would have been quite prepared for any eventuality of the future. . . . Miss Emily was learning the piano, receiving lessons from the best professor in Belgium, and she herself already had little pupils. She was losing whatever remained of ignorance, and also of what was worse—timidity.” There followed a paragraph about Charlotte’s growing aplomb in the teaching of French. Then: “This is not, believe me, Sir,—this is not a question of personal interest: it is a question of affection.” He referred ardently to their “personal qualities, their good nature, their intense zeal. . . .”

Poor Charlotte. That pedagogical “little black being” whom she started out to lampoon, she had ended by loving. Just what proportion of that love was pupil-to-teacher and what proportion woman-to-man must remain a moot point. Papa could not read French; that is proved by the French phrase-book he took to Brussels, with “Food,” “Desert and Drink,” “Numerals,” “Days and Months,” “French Coins,” naively and carefully marked. What more natural than for Papa to ask Charlotte, star French scholar, to have the goodness to read him M. Héger’s letter? Charlotte strove to keep her voice from trembling. “Accept, I pray you, Sir, the respectful expression of my sentiments of high regard. C. Héger.”<sup>1</sup>

On November 10 Charlotte wrote Ellen: “Aunt, Martha Taylor, and Mr. Weightman are now all gone: how dreary and void everything seems.”<sup>2</sup> But it is suspected that “everything” was a little drearier and a little more void because of a Belgian gentleman—alas, married.

She began almost immediately to agitate going back to Brussels. Why should she not, she reasoned, if she wanted to? By the terms of Aunt Branwell’s Last Will and Testament she now possessed not only Aunt’s Indian workbox (as Emily possessed Aunt’s workbox with a china top and ivory fan, Branwell her Japan dressing-box, and Anne her watch) but also a third of Aunt’s odds and ends, such as eye-glass and chain, rings, silver-spoons, books and clothes;

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 280, 281.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I. 282.

and also, like Emily, Anne and a Cornish cousin named Elizabeth Jane Kingston, a fourth of the £1200 Aunt had amassed, which was to be "put into a safe bank or lent on good landed security." *Why not go back to M. Héger?*<sup>1</sup>

There were reasons. Papa was nearly seventy and slowly going blind; and drinking more than was good for him—the habit had grown in adversity. Tabby at seventy-two was lame and hobbling—though she still tried to do, in Martha Brown's despite; for instance, jealously performing her old job of peeling potatoes, though Charlotte, with better sight, had to come along behind her and surreptitiously cut out the eyes.<sup>2</sup> Anne could not leave her position at Thorp Green. Therefore Charlotte or Emily must remain at home. Without hesitation Emily said she would be the one to remain.<sup>3</sup> It was not a punishment.

What did she care about academics?

She felt like the dead snuffing sweet air again. Ah, nothing was changed on the moors. Wild ducks rose from grey tussocks of hair-grass and golden-bent as she approached; the north wind slashed at her face; wherever she looked stretched sky and her mind went still further—there was no end.

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 277, 278.

<sup>2</sup> Gaskell, 315.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

## XXV

### INTERLUDE

THE next two and a half years in Emily's life were a period of incubation—or perhaps gestation is a better word since it suggests a more intimate and painful bringing-forth. She had tried merriment; she had tried learning; and abandoned both as of small worth to her soul's purpose. What is the soul's purpose? The answer was implicit in her days. The soul's purpose is, while living in the body, to transcend it; and with it, all other limitations—since infinity is its native country, and nothing short of its native country can cure it of craving homesickness.

In a sense, at the beginning of 1843 she was back where she had been at the beginning of 1840, when the load on her conscience had made death seem desirable. In a sense. There were two differences. She was three years older, which means that her tragedy was less raw by three years; and first Willy Weightman and then the *Pensionnat* Héger and then three deaths in a row had added substantially to her experience. So she was changed. And she was not changed. She was not changed, and never could change, toward the moors. Once in Brussels she had answered implied ridicule of her unstylish slack-hanging petticoats by saying: "I wish to be as God made me."<sup>1</sup> That was Emily in more ways than petticoats. God had made her with a passion for infinity as bodied forth in pathless moors, and now, after bitter exile, her feet were again treading the soft uncivilized grass.

Of course, in her human capacity as daughter and sister, she was to some extent involved in the comings and goings and ambitions and frustrations of the household: in Ellen's visit early in January, for instance, made in return for Charlotte's to Brookroyd last November; and in homely details such as those revealed in a letter from hostess to departed guest: "Dear Nell,—My striped dress is not cut cross ways. . . . I found the brush under the sofa"—evidently missed by Ellen—"and last Saturday I found the bustle—for which"—she might have said *with* which—"you deserve smothering. . . . You have left your Bible; how can I send it?"<sup>2</sup>

Likewise Emily was indirectly but strongly, by power of

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 227; Chadwick, 226.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 285.

imaginative participation, involved in Charlotte's return to Brussels toward the end of January.

Involved, but not absorbed. Her deeper life was lived without human entanglements, in the box-room and on the moors—which is to say, in her own breast. The house was very still: Anne had returned to Thorp Green and Branwell joined her, as tutor to the Robinsons' only son. The fields were still: if she listened intently, she heard sheep munching. The moors were still: the kestrels that rose in front of her skimmed away on noiseless wings and, if they cried, the sound but emphasized the stillness.

One wonders if, alone with Papa, evenings, she ever questioned him closely about their kin in Ireland to whom he sent £20 a year;<sup>1</sup> or about his sister Sarah's daughter Mrs. Heslip, her first cousin, who now lived at Oakenshaw near Bradford. . . .

At this time Mary Taylor, writing Ellen Nussey from Iserlohn and her experimental teaching of boys, commented on some news. "Tell me," she said, "something about Emily Brontë. I can't imagine how the newly acquired qualities can fit in, in the same head and heart that are occupied by the old ones. I imagine," she added sarcastically, "Emily turning over prints or 'taking wine' with any stupid pup and preserving her temper and politeness!"<sup>2</sup>

Emily cooked in the kitchen with a German book propped up in front of her; or a scrap of paper and pencil near, so that she could jot down a thought.<sup>3</sup>

On February 6 she finished a long poem called "Aspin Castle,"<sup>4</sup> the romanticism of which seems superimposed and is curiously unconvincing: the "phantom pale with spirit-eyes of dreamy blue" dissolves. On February 24 she wrote "On the Fall of Zalona," but that too is weak stuff, not in comparison with some of her earlier Gondal poems, but in comparison with what may legitimately be expected of Emily, now. But these failures have little significance. They are chaff blown off by the wind. The wheat has been planted; it is breast-high; but it has not yet been cut and ground. . . .

By April she was writing better poetry, perhaps because her themes were more personal. "How Clear She Shines," dated April 13, is an evocation of fancy, while lying in her

<sup>1</sup> Robinson, 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 274; Robinson, 142.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 292.

<sup>4</sup> Drafted August 20, 1842.



tiny bedroom under moonlight. Abounding in biographical references, it changes swiftly from an expression of joy into a terrible indictment:

How clear she shines! How quietly  
I lie beneath her guardian light;  
While heaven and earth are whispering me,  
"Tomorrow, wake, but dream tonight."

Yes, Fancy, come, my Fairy love!  
These throbbing temples softly kiss;  
And bend my lonely couch above,  
And bring me rest, and bring me bliss.

The world is going; dark world, adieu!  
Grim world, conceal thee till the day;  
The heart thou canst not all subdue  
Must still resist, if thou delay!

. . . . .

And this shall be my dream tonight;  
I'll think the heaven of glorious spheres  
Is rolling on its course of light  
In endless bliss, through endless years;

I'll think, there's not one world above,  
Far as these straining eyes can see,  
Where Wisdom ever laughed at Love,  
Or Virtue crouched to Infamy;

Where, writhing 'neath the strokes of Fate,  
The mangled wretch was forced to smile;  
To match his patience 'gainst her hate,  
His heart rebellious all the while;

Where Pleasure still will lead to wrong,  
And helpless Reason warn in vain;  
And Truth is weak, and Treachery strong;  
And Joy the surest path to Pain;

And Peace, the lethargy of Grief;  
And Hope, a phantom of the soul;  
And Life, a labour, void and brief;  
And Death, the despot of the whole!

How simple and fine:

The world is going; dark world, adieu!  
Grim world, conceal thee till the day. . . .

It was a grim world indeed which could teach her that treachery was strong (the old plaint) and peace negative, the "lethargy of grief."

Yet in "Stars," a poem written the next day, she says,

"I was at peace," and it seems a peace more sweet and positive than grief's exhaustion:

Ah! why, because the dazzling sun  
Restored our Earth to joy,  
Have you departed, every one,  
And left a desert sky?

. . . . .

I was at peace, and drank your beams  
As they were life to me;  
And revelled in my changeful dreams,  
Like petrel on the sea

Thought followed thought, star followed star  
Through boundless regions on;  
While one sweet influence, near and far,  
Thrilled through, and proved us one!

Why did the morning dawn to break  
So great, so pure a spell;  
And scorch with fire the tranquil cheek,  
Where your cool radiance fell?

Blood-red he rose, and, arrow-straight,  
His fierce beams struck my brow;  
The soul of nature sprang, elate,  
But *mine* sank sad and low.

. . . . .

I turned me to the pillow, then,  
To call back night, and see  
Your worlds of solemn light, again,  
Throb with my heart, and me!

It would not do—the pillow glowed,  
And glowed both roof and floor;  
And birds sang loudly in the wood,  
And fresh winds shook the door;

The curtains waved, the wakened flies  
Were murmuring round my room,  
Imprisoned there, till I should rise,  
And give them leave to roam.

O stars and dreams, and gentle night;  
O night and stars, return!  
And hide me from the hostile light  
That does not warm, but burn . . .<sup>1</sup>

Compared to her poem of the previous day, this strikes shallowly; but as an intimate glimpse of Emily lying in bed, still wide awake at dawn and stirred to regret by her affinity with night, it is as valuable as any passage from a prose diary.

<sup>1</sup> April 14, 1843.

But she returned to Gondal themes and mediocrity. "Grave in the Ocean" of May 1 has only a small gem in it, "With thy mind's vision pierce the deep," and "A Serenade" of May 4 only two, both being sudden reversions to her own experience:

Think not of future grief  
 Entailed on present joy:  
 An age of woe were only brief  
 Its memory to destroy!

And neither Hell nor Heaven,  
 Though both conspire at last,  
 Can take the bliss that has been given,  
 Can rob us of the past . . .

On the first of May Charlotte had written Branwell from Brussels: "I grieve only that Emily is so solitary. . . ." Did she know Emily so little as not to know that Emily was happiest when solitary? Later she wrote: "Dear E. J. . . . I hope you are well and hearty. Walk out often on the moors"—as if Emily needed to be told to do that which gave life meaning! She was on the moors morning and evening, with Keeper at her heels. Hannah a temporary maid had gone away and left her little sister a weight on Emily's hands; and Tabby (who was back) limped on her bad leg, mumbling fiercely to herself; so that housework piled up, and, being done, piled up again—but whenever possible, Emily was out, she was gone, treading the moors as strong and fleet as Aphrodite; but not like Aphrodite pronounceably feminine: in nature more like Mercury the boy.<sup>1</sup>

"Dear Miss Ellen," she wrote on May 22, thawing just a little from "Miss Nussey," but still illustrating by a curious formality the difference between her inward and outward life: "I should be wanting in common civility if I did not thank you for your kindness in letting me know of an opportunity to send 'postage free'. . . . Charlotte has never mentioned a word about coming home, if you would go over for half a year perhaps you might be able to bring her back with you, otherwise she may vegetate there till the age of Methuselah for mere lack of courage to face the voyage." Anne, she said, was well, and "if she be willing," during the holidays, "I will get her to write you a proper letter—a feat that I have never performed. With love and good wishes, E. J. Brontë." <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 296, 298, 299.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 298. This letter is the only complete, signed holograph letter of Emily's known to exist.

Then, between July 26 and 28 Emily wrote a series of fitful poems all but one of which are uneven. Here is that one, a remembrance of the mystery of snow:

It was night, and on the mountains  
Fathoms deep the snow-drifts lay;  
Streams and waterfalls and fountains  
Down the darkness stole away.

Long ago the hapless peasant  
Left his sheep and buried there:  
Sheep that through the summer pleasant  
He had watched with tenderest care.

Now, no more a cheerful ranger,  
Following pathways known of yore,  
Sad he stood, a wide-eyed stranger,  
On his own unbounded moor.

This was followed by a quatrain which illustrates her continued and deep concern with moral issues. Once long ago she had accused herself of falsehood along with the rest of a corrupt world; but here is vindication:

Had there been falsehood in my breast,  
No doubt had marr'd my word;  
This spirit had not lost its rest;  
These tears had never flowed.<sup>1</sup>

Then on July 28 she wrote a Gondal artificiality about lying awake all night staring up at the sky in which occur three "real" stanzas:

I gazed upon the cloudless moon,  
And loved her all the night,  
Till morning came and radiant noon,  
And I forgot her light —

No—not forgot, eternally  
Remains its memory dear;  
But could the day seem dark to me  
Because the night was fair?

I well may mourn that only one  
Can light my future sky,  
Even though by such a radiant sun  
My moon of life must die.

Then a dirge to the dead, in which Martha Taylor and Willy Weightman and Aunt and her lost love got all mixed up in a transport of grief; a farewell which is recognition

<sup>1</sup> July 26, 1843.

that the living and the dead can (and should) have no traffic:

Yes, holy be thy resting-place  
Wherever thou mayst lie;  
The sweetest winds breathe on thy face,  
The softest of the sky.

Farewell, farewell! 'Tis hard to part,  
Yet, loved one, it must be,  
I would not rend another heart,  
Not even with blessing thee.

Go! We must break affection's chain,  
Forget the hope of years:  
Nay, grieve not—wouldst thou remain  
To waken wilder tears?

This heart burns with thee and me,  
Loves it the dreaming day:  
But thou shouldst be where it shall be  
Ere evening, far away.

Then "Love's Contentment," a slightly effusive Gondal poem in which two lovers, meeting, are so happy they cannot believe in future disaster. This brought to mind her own joy of 1838—and the poem veers sharply to:

I know our souls are all divine;  
I know that when we die,  
What seems the vilest, even like thine  
A part of God himself shall shine  
In perfect purity.

Then art not thou my golden June  
All mist and tempest free?  
As shines earth's sun in summer noon  
So heaven's sun shines in thee.

Let others seek its beams divine  
In cell and cloister drear;  
But I have found a fairer shrine,  
And happier worship here.

By dismal rites they win their bliss,—  
By penance, fasts, and fears;  
I have one rite: a gentle kiss;  
One penance: tender tears.

Oh, could it thus for ever be  
That I might so adore;  
I'd ask for all eternity  
To make a paradise for me,  
My love,—and nothing more.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> July 28, 1843.

So neither Willy Weightman's levity nor Brussels had really helped at all. The image graven on her heart at nineteen was as clear-cut and authoritative as ever, at twenty-five.

Love and death and immortality, and then, again repeating the cycle so native to her thought, love and death . . .

In the earth—the ear h—thou shalt be laid,  
A grey stone standing over thee;  
Black mould beneath thee spread,  
And black mould to cover thee.

And she speaks of

The time when my sunny hair  
Shall with grass roots entwined be—

and of how, alas,

Turf-sod and tombstone drear  
Part human company . . .<sup>1</sup>

By October Charlotte was eager to come home. From the beginning it had not gone well, her second Brussels adventure. The train from Leeds to London, last January, had arrived two hours late, and rather than enter the Chapter Coffee House at an unseemly hour, she had caught a cab to London Bridge Wharf, paid a waterman to row her to the Ostend packet due to sail the next morning, and stood up, tremblingly but pleasurably excited, in the dark of the night, to call across the water to the black hulk, demanding that they abrogate their rule so that she could sleep aboard. At the *Pensionnat* she had been too timid to accept Monsieur and Madame Héger's invitation to use their sitting-room as her own; but had walked alone in the *allée défendue*, safe from intrusion but missing Emily terribly (as Mary Taylor said: "When people have so little amusement they cannot afford to lose *any*"); had encountered difficulties in giving regular English lessons to Monsieur Héger and his brother-in-law Monsieur Chapelle, and in quelling her pupils' sullen mutiny; had suffered, in the gloom and excruciating cold of Lent, from feet and hands getting red and swelling (so that she thanked heaven Ellen had not accompanied her to Belgium after all); had grown, according to her own testimony, "exceedingly misanthropic and sour," especially on the subject of her co-teacher, the "repulsive and arbitrary" Mademoiselle Blanche ("also she invents," she wrote Emily, "which I

<sup>1</sup> "Warning and Reply," September 6, 1843.

should not have thought"); had decided that Madame H  ger disliked her and that, after all, she thoroughly disliked Madame H  ger; had noted morosely that Morsieur was "wonderfully influenced by Madame," and bitten her lips during his lecture to her on universal *bienveillance*; had protested to Ellen August 6: "Alas! I can hardly write, I have such a dreary weight at my heart; and do so wish to go home . . ."; and then, taking a whim in St. Gudule's to confess to a Catholic priest, had overridden his scruples; and then tramped the streets of Brussels and the fields beyond; and on October 1, in a grimly humorous burst, written: "Dear E. J., —This is Sunday morning. They are at their idolatrous 'messe,' and I am here—that is, in the *r  fectoire*. I should like uncommonly to be in the dining-room at home, or in the kitchen, or in the back kitchen. I should like even to be cutting up the hash, with the clerk and some register people at the other table, and you standing by, watching that I put enough flour, and not too much pepper, and, above all, that I save the best pieces of the leg of mutton for Tiger and Keeper, the first of which personages would be jumping about the dish and carving-knife, and the latter standing like a devouring flame on the kitchen floor. To complete the picture, Tabby blowing the fire, in order to boil the potatoes to a sort of vegetable glue! How divine are these recollections to me at this moment! . . . You call yourself idle! absurd, absurd! . . . Write to me again soon. Tell me whether Papa really wants me very much to come home, and whether you do likewise. I have an idea that I should be of no use there—a sort of aged person upon the parish. I pray, with heart and soul, that all may continue well at Haworth; above all in our grey, half-inhabited house. God bless the wall thereof! . . . Amen." <sup>1</sup>

Charlotte's few pleasures seem to have only troubled her now: Monsieur H  ger taking her and a pupil into town during Carnival to see the masking and mummery; Monsieur loaning her books; Monsieur "the black Swan" giving her a German testament; Monsieur flinging her a word like a crust. Certainly no one else counted. "The people here," she had written Branwell, "are no go whatsoever. Amongst 120 persons which compose the daily population of this house, I can discern only one or two who deserve anything like regard. . . . Nobody ever gets into a passion here.

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 286–310; Gaskell, 252, 253.

The phlegm that thickens their blood is too gluey to boil." Yet her life was not devoid of interesting events, as witness her nostalgic letter of October 1, to Emily: "You ask me about Queen Victoria's visit to Brussels. I saw her for an instant flashing through the Rue Royale in a carriage and six, surrounded by soldiers. She was laughing, and talking very gaily. She looked a little stout, vivacious lady, very plainly dressed, not much dignity or pretension about her. The Belgians liked her very well on the whole. They said she enlivened the sombre Court of King Leopold, which is usually as gloomy as a conv ivicle." That, surely, was a fig for the children who had hungered for the high affairs of royalty—children now grown up, one in Brussels and one in Haworth, but in some respects, fortunately, still naïve.<sup>1</sup>

One day soon after the writing of this letter, Charlotte suddenly went to Madame Héger and gave notice; whereupon Monsieur Héger sent for her and "pronounced with vehemence his decision that she should not leave." She promised to stay a while longer. But she was too conventional to be able to rest under the same roof as a married man whom she had the affliction to love. The worst of it was she could confide in no one. "I have much to say Ellen—many little odd things queer and puzzling enough—which I do not like to trust to a letter. . . ." One day, in a desperation of loneliness, she scribbled in her *Russell's General Atlas of Modern Geography*: "First Class. I am very cold—there is no fire—I wish I were at home with Papa—Branwell—Emily—Anne & Tabby—I am tired of being among foreigners—it is a dreary life—especially as there is only one person in this house worthy of being liked. . . ." Madame she "no longer trusted." The Wheelwrights had left in August, and she seldom saw the Dixons or Jenkins any more. Martha, in the cemetery beyond the Porte de Louvain, was a poor companion. The dreaded *grandes vacances* threw her constantly with Mademoiselle Blanche the sensual Frenchwoman she despised. At night she could not sleep but lay with wide open eyes, staring on black, that absence of colour, that nothingness, thinking on Monsieur Héger. Had he quarrelled with Madame about her? Madame was no fool . . . and yet . . . and yet . . . there had been no outward and overt act . . . there had been nothing.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 297, 305.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 306, 307.



So on December 19 she wrote Emily: "Dear E. J.,—I have taken my determination. I hope to be at home the day after New Year's Day. . . . Low spirits have afflicted me very much lately, but I hope all will be well when I get home . . . I am not ill in body. It is only the mind which is a trifle shaken—for want of comfort."<sup>1</sup>

She arrived at the Parsonage with a collar and fichu of Brussels lace on net<sup>2</sup> and a pair of net sleeves.<sup>2</sup> But more prized was a kind of diploma, sealed with the seal of the Athénée Royal and signed by Monsieur Constantin Héger. Also a number of books he had given her, including *Bernardin de St. Pierre* and the *Pensées* of Pascal.<sup>3</sup>

How did Emily feel about this return? Not sorry—for of late years her sympathy with her elder sister had greatly increased. But not, one suspects, jubilant—in spite of her Gondal poem of December 19, "North and South," which ends with a plea that absent ones come home:

Home to our souls whose wearying sighs  
Lament their absence debar;  
And, oh, how bright even winter skies  
Would shine, if they were here!

At times—for such things vary—her secret feeling must have approached that of the last stanza of another Gondal poem, "Roderic":

But, never more! Look up and see  
The twilight fading from the skies:  
That last dim beam that sets for thee,  
Roderic, for thee shall never rise.<sup>4</sup>

Taking Aunt's large bedroom Charlotte did not disturb Emily in her cubicle. Nevertheless she subtly changed the atmosphere of house and moor by presence and proximity. Emily had cherished being alone in the old, delicious, exclusive sense. In that sense she was never again in her life alone. . . .

For a year Emily's experience had incubated in her mind while she moved about, solitary; now it was to incubate while she moved about attended. There were signs and portents of what was to come, but for the present only signs and portents.

The situation at home was not very encouraging, what with Papa ill and blind as a leather-winged bat; and

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 309, 310.

<sup>2</sup> Museum.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 19.

<sup>4</sup> December 18, 1843.

Charlotte's heart so heavy she could scarcely lug it up the stair, or out the door, or from one room to another. For though Charlotte at school had been "cut by twinges of homesickness," Charlotte at home was cut by twinges of schoolsickness. She could not admit it to herself. In love with a married man? Why no, no, no, she kept telling herself. She loved the professor, not the man. *That* was permissible, wasn't it?

What she needed, the doctor in her told the patient in her, was a "stake in life." . . . So she re-proposed enlarging the Parsonage and founding a school. Aunt's legacy would finance it, and the Brussels training increase their prestige as teachers. What do you think of the plan, Emily? It's all right. Will you lend yourself to it, Emily? Yes. So they sounded Ellen and Miss Wooler and Mrs. White and everyone else they could think of, for pupils; and had a circular printed:

THE MISSES BRONTE'S ESTABLISHMENT  
FOR  
THE BOARD AND EDUCATION  
of a Limited Number of  
YOUNG LADIES,  
THE PARSONAGE, HAWORTH,  
NEAR BRADFORD.

TERMS.

			£	s.	d.
Board and Education, including Writing, Arithmetic, History, Grammar, Geography, and Needle Work, per Annum . . . . .			35	0	0
French . . . . .	} each per Quarter . . . . .		1	1	0
German . . . . .					
Latin . . . . .					
Music . . . . .	} each per Quarter . . . . .		1	1	0
Drawing . . . . .					
Use of Piano Forte, per Quarter . . . . .			0	5	0
Washing, per Quarter . . . . .			0	15	0

Each Young Lady to be provided with One Pair of Sheets, Pillow Cases, Four Towels, a Dessert and Tea Spoon.

A Quarter's Notice, or a Quarter's Board, is required previous to the Removal of a Pupil.

Then they waited, to the ghostly accompaniment of wind. Not a pupil applied. The net result was a stack of left-over circulars.<sup>1</sup>

So Charlotte reverted to her woe, which was not lessened by a conviction that she deserved it. "I returned to Brussels after Aunt's death," she was to admit, later, to Ellen, "against my conscience . . ." and "was punished for my selfish folly by a total withdrawal . . . of happiness and peace of mind."<sup>2</sup> "There are times now," she said this spring of 1844, "when it appears to me as if all my ideas and feelings, except a few friendships and affections, are changed from what they used to be; something in me, which used to be enthusiasm, is tamed down and broken. I have fewer illusions. . . . Haworth seems such a lonely, quiet spot, buried away from the world. I no longer regard myself as young—indeed, I shall soon be twenty-eight. . . ." She "speculated much on the existence of unmarried and never-to-be-married women;"<sup>3</sup> while Emily transcribed poems into a little four-by-six notebook with dark red covers.<sup>4</sup>

Charlotte and Emily were sisters in woe as in blood—but Emily, as always, was more thorough. When happy, she was tremendously, uncontrollably, ecstatically happy; when sad, she plunged down to the nethermost nether region. "At Castle Wood" is a swinging back to the old idea that she was marked, doomed and damned from the day of her birth:

The day is done, the winter sun  
Is setting in its sullen sky;  
And drear the course that has been run,  
And dim the hearts that slowly die.

Through life's hard task I did not ask  
Celestial aid, celestial cheer:  
I saw my fate without a mask,  
And met it too without a tear.

Dark falls the fear of this despair  
On spirits born of happiness;  
But I was born the mate of care,  
The foster-child of sore distress.

No sighs for me, no sympathy,  
No wish to keep my soul below;  
The heart is dead in infancy,  
Unwept-for let the body go.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 1-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 115.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 77.

<sup>4</sup> See Preface; also page 202.

<sup>5</sup> February 2, 1844.

But soon after this she acknowledged a comforter; which may have been flesh-and-blood Anne, or Charlotte, or the impalpable Maria, but was more probably a recurrence of that mystical union with the divine which had assuaged her trouble at Law Hill, and thereafter infrequently:

Deep down, conceal'd within my soul,  
That light lies hid from men;  
Yet glows unquenched—though shadows roll.

So stood I, in Heaven's glorious sun,  
And in the glare of Hell;  
My spirit drank a mingled tone,  
Of seraph's song, and demon's moan;  
What my soul bore, my soul alone  
Within its soul may tell!

Like a soft air above a sea,  
Tossed by the tempest's stir;  
A thaw-wind, melting quietly  
The snow drift on some wintry lea;  
No: what sweet thing resembles thee,  
My thoughtful comforter?<sup>1</sup>

But how could she be lastingly comforted for the grievous and irremediable? She wrote a clear statement of guilt, evidently to her love—which seems to strengthen the hypothesis of peculiarity:

I know that I have done thee wrong,  
Have wronged both thee and Heaven;  
And I may mourn my lifetime long,  
And may not be forgiven.

Repentant tears will vainly fall  
To cover deeds untrue;  
But for no grief can I recall  
The dreary word,—Adieu.

Yet thou a future peace shalt win,  
Because thy soul is clear;  
And I who had the heart to sin  
Will find a heart to bear;

Till, far beyond earth's frenzied strife,  
That makes destruction joy,  
Thy perished faith shall spring to life,  
And my remorse shall die.<sup>2</sup>

To frame this in words, even on paper which she thought no eyes but hers would ever see, cost her dear. It was the beginning of a long oscillation of blame; and appears to

<sup>1</sup> "My Comforter," February 10, 1844.

<sup>2</sup> March 2, 1844.

corroborate the theory that she had made an advance which seemed natural and innocent but which the one she loved considered—and the world would consider, if it knew—unnatural. At first she had blamed the other person (with whom, it is gathered, she had till this event had a relation fine and delicate) for drawing back and then forsaking her altogether. Now she seems to blame herself for ever having made the advance; for ever having tried to change the quality of the thing between them. She has done all she could to expiate the “sin” here. Would death mercifully give her further opportunities?

In “A Day Dream,” written March 5, she is lying on a “heathy bank,” wondering

And why should we be glad at all?  
The leaf is hardly green,  
Before a token of its fall  
Is on the surface seen!

when suddenly she fancied that a thousand “little glittering spirits” were singing:

O mortal! mortal! let them die;  
Let time and tears destroy. . . .

What did it matter? Beyond dark death it “brightened more and more.”

And could we lift the veil, and give  
One brief glimpse to thine eye,  
Thou wouldst rejoice for those that live,  
Because they live to die.

As she thought this she stared into a sea of sky, coloured like the bluebells within reach of her hand. She had lain her lank length down very carefully, we may be sure, not to crush the frail flowers. . . .

In March Charlotte visited Ellen, and on her return reported back to Ellen that Emily was well; adding, “Emily is much obliged to you for the flower seeds. She wishes to know if the Sicilian pea and crimson corn-flower are hardy flowers, or if they are delicate, and should be sown in warm and sheltered situations.” Emily made shallow troughs in the dirt, sowing seeds, covering them, pressing them down, then carrying water in a bucket or a pitcher. “Our poor little cat has been ill two days,” wrote Charlotte, “and is just dead. It is piteous to see even an animal lying lifeless. Emily is sorry.” . . .<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 5.

That last is characteristic. So marked was her love of dumb creatures that a villager got the erroneous impression and told Mrs. Gaskell that "she never showed regard to any human creature; all her love was reserved for animals."<sup>1</sup> But it is true she would often bring home a bird or young rabbit in the cup of her hands, talking to it softly. "Eë, Miss Emily," the servant said, "a body 'ud think it understood you." "I am sure it can," she answered. "Oh, I am sure it can."<sup>2</sup>

In May Emily finished an extremely long, rambling Gondal poem,<sup>3</sup> in which, in the first part, she seems to identify her love with "Angelica;" and herself with the man who woos:

"Angelica, from my very birth  
I have been nursed in strife;  
And lived upon this weary earth  
A wanderer, all my life.

. . . . .

"The guiltless blood up on my hands  
Will shut me out from Heaven;  
And here, and even in foreign lands,  
I cannot find a haven.

"And in all space, and in all clime,  
And through eternity,  
To aid a spirit lost in crime,  
I have no hope but thee.

"Yct, I will swear no saint on high  
A truer faith could prove;  
No angel from that holy sky  
Could give thee purer love.

"For thee, through never-ending years,  
I'd suffer endless pain;  
But only give me back my tears,—  
Return my love again!"

But the lady answers:

I've known a hundred kinds of love:  
All made the loved one rue. . . .

And the chaotic tale of love and treachery moves on obscurely. . . .

The weather was delightful, and Emily and Charlotte walked out a great deal on the moors "to the great damage of their shoes."<sup>4</sup> Around and above the dead, life teemed:

<sup>1</sup> Gaskell, 274.

<sup>2</sup> Robinson, 66.

<sup>3</sup> Begun in January, 1841.

<sup>4</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 5.

The linnet in the rocky dells,  
 The moor-lark in the air,  
 The bee among the heather-bells  
 That hide my lady fair:

The wild deer browse above her breast;  
 The wild birds raise their brood. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Apparently Emily told Charlotte not a word of what ate at her heart. Did Charlotte tell Emily what ate at hers? Did she repeat what she had told Ellen: "I think, however long I live, I shall not forget what the parting with M. Héger cost me"?<sup>2</sup> She may have hinted, may have implied; may, all unknowing, have given herself away. But there is reason to believe that she did not deliberately make a confidante of her sister Emily—however far they walked, however long.<sup>3</sup>

The summer of 1844 was much like other summers. In June Charlotte broke precedent by giving a little tea—and Emily's distress can be imagined. Then Anne and Branwell came home on vacation; and Ellen visited, and was presented with Flossy Jr., the offspring of a silky black dog given to Anne by the Robinsons; and Charlotte and Emily mended shirts; and Charlotte wrote to twit Ellen about James William Smith, Willy Weightman's successor—as she had twitted her about this and that curate for years. "I have nothing new to tell you about the Revd Mr Lothario—Lovelace Smith—I think I like him a little bit less every day—I am glad now he did not ask you to marry him. . . . Mr Weightman was worth 200 Mr Smiths tied in a bunch."<sup>4</sup>

But Charlotte's mind was not on Mr. Smith; it was on M. Héger, to whom, in July, she sent, not her first letter, but the first extant. "I once wrote you a letter that was less than reasonable," she showed weakness by saying, "because sorrow was at my heart; but I shall do so no more." She mentioned, proudly, her turning down the offer of a situation as first governess in a large school in Manchester at £100 a year; and the school they wanted to found. "Emily does not care much for teaching, but she would look after the housekeeping, and, although something of a recluse, she is too good-hearted not to do all she could for the well-being of the children. Moreover, she is very generous. . . ." But what she, Charlotte, would really *like* to do was write

<sup>1</sup> May 1, 1844. <sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 31. <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 70. <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 6-9.

a book and dedicate it to her literature-master. However, she mourned, the career of letters was closed to her, only that of teaching was open. "My sight is too weak. . . . Were I to write much I should become blind." At the end, in spite of her resolution to be discreet, she could not keep anxiety and love out of her voice: "Once more, good-bye, Monsieur; it hurts to say good-bye even in a letter. Oh, it is certain that I shall see you again one day—it must be so—for as soon as I shall have earned enough money to go to Brussels I shall go there—and I shall see you again if only for a moment."

In October she wrote again, gently reproaching him for not having answered her letter<sup>1</sup>

Does Charlotte seem to dominate, at times, this book on Emily? It is inevitable, since Charlotte's correspondence is one of the few original sources. Moreover, there is some artistic justification for her prevalence: in outward ways she dominated the Parsonage. She was so very busy improving herself and (it must be confessed) sometimes trying to improve others, she was all over the place. But for a long time Charlotte's fine powers and human character had been developing, and she was at this point infinitely pathetic in her hopeless love.

Emily was touched without being touched. She had a secret self into which she withdrew; she had imagination on which to feed. In September she wrote a pertinent poem, "To Imagination":

So hopeless is the world without,  
The world within I doubly prize;  
Thy world, where guile, and hate, and doubt  
And cold suspicion never rise;  
Where thou, and I, and Liberty,  
Have undisputed sovereignty.

What matters it, that all around  
Danger, and guilt, and darkness lie,  
If but within our bosom's bound  
We hold a bright, untroubled sky,  
Warm with ten thousand mingled rays  
Of suns that know no winter days?

I trust not to thy phantom bliss,  
Yet, still, in evening's quiet hour,  
With never-failing thankfulness,  
I welcome thee, Benignant Power,  
Sure solacer of human cares,  
And sweeter hope, when hope despairs!<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 11-13, 18, 19.

<sup>2</sup> September 3, 1844.



As an example of what imagination could do, on October 2 she wrote a Gondal poem about two friends who must enjoy their last moments together because in future they can meet only as foes. The poem has a beautiful swing about it, like the words of one who has thrown back her head and taken the deep breath of courage:

Come, the wind may never again  
Blow as now it blows for us,  
And the stars may never again shine as now they  
shine.  
Long before October returns  
Seas of blood will have parted us  
And you must crush the love in your heart  
And I, the love in mine!  
For face to face will our kindred stand  
And as they are so we shall be,  
Forgetting how the same sweet earth has borne and  
nourished all.

. . . . .  
So the wind may never again  
Blow as now it blows for us  
And the stars may never again shine as now they  
shine.  
Next October the cannon's roar  
From hostile ranks may be urging us—  
Me to strike for your life's blood and you to  
strike for mine.

This is one of the unpublished poems from the Smith Manuscript. It is in explanation of a Gondal incident, but more than that. Because of her lost love Emily has thought deeply about how true moments between two hearts cannot be wiped out, no matter what estrangement follows.

This was poor comfort. But mysticism comforted her for the poor comfort.

This same October "Plead for Me" was addressed to the "God of Visions" who actively fulfilled himself in her the austere devotee:

Oh, thy bright eyes must answer now,  
When Reason, with a scornful brow,  
Is mocking at my overthrow!  
Oh, thy sweet tongue must plead for me  
And tell why I have chosen thee!  
Stern Reason is to judgment come,  
Arrayed in all her forms of gloom:  
Wilt thou, my advocate, be dumb?  
No, radiant angel, speak and say  
Why I did cast the world away,—

Why I have persevered to shun  
 The common paths that others run;  
 And on a strange road journeyed on,  
 Heedless, alike of wealth and power—  
 Of glory's wreath and pleasure's flower.

These once, indeed, seemed Beings Divine;  
 And they, perchance heard vows of mine,  
 And saw my offering on their shrine;  
 But careless gifts are seldom prized,  
 And *mine* were worthily despised.

So, with a ready heart, I swore  
 To seek their altar-stone no more;  
 And gave my spirit to adore  
 Thee, ever-present, phantom thing—  
 My slave, my comrade, and my king.

A slave, because I rule thee still;  
 Incline thee to my changeful will,  
 And make thy influence good or ill:  
 A comrade, for by day and night  
 Thou art my intimate delight,—

My darling pain that wounds and sears,  
 And wrings a blessing out from tears  
 By deadening me to earthly cares;  
 And yet, a king, though Prudence well  
 Have taught thy subject to rebel.

And am I wrong to worship where  
 Faith cannot doubt, nor hope despair,  
 Since my own soul can grant my prayer?  
 Speak, God of visions, plead for me,  
 And tell why I have chosen thee.<sup>1</sup>

The last stanza of this strong poem is an example of the clean style that was becoming more and more natural to her: a style as unadorned as the back of her hand. Its development had been concomitant with growth of character.

To believe in immortal values is to believe in immortality, and when she thought of those who had died she did believe with fresh conviction—as witness “Faith and Despondency” of November 6:

Oh! not for them should we despair,—  
 The grave is drear, but they are not there;  
 Their dust is mingled with the sod;  
 Their happy souls are gone to God!

. . . . .

<sup>1</sup> October 14, 1844.

I weary for that land divine,  
 Where we were born, where you and I  
 Shall meet our dearest, when we die;  
 From suffering and corruption free,  
 Restored into the Deity . . .

It is plain her poetic power was intermittent; it flowed and ebbed. It was ebbing when she wrote on November 11 "Love's Rebuke" and "The Elder's Rebuke," and flowing when she wrote on November 21 "Honour's Martyr," and ebbing again on December 18 with a poem about hope being false and unrelenting. In "Honour's Martyr" she, Douglas, rises in the moonlight, to walk about the silent dwelling where

The old clock in the gloomy hall  
 Ticks on, from hour to hour;  
 And every time its measured call  
 Seems lingering slow and slower:  
 And, oh, how slow that keen-eyed star  
 Has tracked the chilly grey!  
 What, watching yet! how very far  
 The morning lies away.

Douglas must part from E. L. Gleneden, a woman (just as Emily was E. J. and Charlotte, C. Brontë), who is not to be confused with R. Gleneden the tyrannicide. In imagination he comes to her chamber door—"Love, are you slumbering still?"—and, unheard, says farewell. He is grieving for his disgrace in the eyes of the world.

Tomorrow, Scorn will blight my name,  
 And Hate will trample me,  
 Will load me with a coward's shame—  
 A traitor's perjury.  
 False friends will launch their covert sneers;  
 True friends will wish me dead;  
 And I shall cause the bitterest tears  
 That you have ever shed.  
 The dark deeds of my outlawed race  
 Will then like virtues shine;  
 And men will pardon their disgrace,  
 Beside the guilt of mine.

The sin was treachery—in the Gondal legend, treachery against royalty for the sake of the people. But Emily was interested in treachery in general; she wanted desperately to understand the actual from the apparent, because for a

long time she had tried to analyze whether she or her love had been to blame. Was an act treachery because the world called it so? Was there not a higher criterion? Douglas says:

Oh, I would give my heart to death  
 To keep my honour fair;  
 Yet, I'll not give my inward faith  
 My honour's *name* to spare!  
 Not even to keep your priceless love,  
 Dare I, Beloved, deceive;  
 This treason should the future prove,  
 Then, only then believe!  
 I know the path I ought to go;  
 I follow fearlessly,  
 Inquiring not what deeper woe  
 Stern duty stores for me.  
 So foes pursue, and cold allies  
 Mistrust me, every one:  
 Let me be false in others' eyes  
 If faithful in my own.

Her conviction of innocence was hard-won, but won.

Thus Christmas hove into sight again, and passed. "Mary Taylor is going to leave our hemisphere," Charlotte wrote. "To me it is something as if a great planet fell out of the sky." Mary has described their last meeting as a melancholy one, at which she reproached Charlotte for supinely accepting a life of little variety or communion with human kind, saying, "Think of what you'll be five years hence!" and stopped, and entreated, "Don't cry, Charlotte"; but Charlotte did cry, and kept walking up and down the room, saying after a while, "But I intend to stay, Polly."<sup>1</sup>

Some of her tears were for Monsieur Héger, whom she had written again, almost abjectly, in January: "Day and night I find neither rest nor peace. If I sleep I am disturbed by tormenting dreams in which I see you, always severe, always grave, always incensed against me. . . . Monsieur, the poor have not need of much to sustain them . . . but if they are refused the crumbs they die of hunger. Nor do I, either, need much affection from those I love. I should not know what to do with a friendship entire and complete—I am not used to it. But you showed me of yore a *little* interest . . . I hold on to it as I would hold on to life."

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 26.

And to Ellen she wrote in desolation, after eight months of suffering: "One day resembles another—and all have heavy, lifeless physiognomies—Sunday—baking-day and Saturday are the only ones that bear the slightest distinctive mark—meantime life wears away. . . . There was a time when Haworth was a very pleasant place to me, it is not so now—I feel as if we were all buried here."<sup>1</sup> Poor Charlotte.

But if Emily was buried it was alive. For one thing, she was in charge of investing Aunt's legacy in railroad shares; and conscientiously scanned all newspapers for railroad references and advertisements. She did not approve of speculative buying and selling; no, they must on no account gamble: which shows that with all her visions, she could be practical. So practical that Charlotte said, kindly, during the railroad panic: "I have been most anxious for us to sell our shares ere it is too late, but . . . I would rather run the risk of loss than hurt Emily's feelings. . . . She managed in a most handsome and able manner for me when I was in Brussels. . . . Disinterested and energetic she certainly is and if she be not quite so tractable and open to conviction as I could wish I must remember perfection is not the lot of humanity and as long as we can regard those we love . . . with profound and never-shaken esteem, it is a small thing that they should vex us occasionally by, what appear to us, unreasonable and headstrong notions. You my dear Miss Wooler know full as well as I do the value of sisters' affection . . . there is nothing like it in this world, I believe. . . ."<sup>2</sup> Emily wrote a Mr. Bignold to ask the premiums on annuities. He answered that the rates for females were very low: 4½ per cent purchased at 25, and 5 per cent at 30. Too low. Emily thought an advantage so trifling would scarcely compensate for the loss of principal, and black-balled annuities.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of a late spring, that dampener, Emily was writing poetry; feeling her way toward a solution of her inward problem. It should be strongly urged, here, that her problem—her tragedy—was not solely one of love. With the most usual and conventional sexual traits and with a Louis Parensell to love her entirely, her temperament would have constituted a problem with tragic implications. February 3 she had written "The Philosopher," who says with beautiful resignation—through her own mouth:

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 23, 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 76.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 32.

Oh, for the time when I shall sleep  
 Without identity,  
 And never care how rain may steep,  
 Or snow may cover me!  
 No promised heaven, these wild desires  
 Could all, or half fulfil;  
 No threatened hell, with quenchless fires,  
 Subdue this quenchless will!

So said I, and still say the same;  
 Still, to my death, will say—  
 Three gods, within this little frame,  
 Are warring, night and day;  
 Heaven could not hold them all, and yet  
 They all are held in me;  
 And must be mine till I forget  
 My present entity!  
 Oh, for the time when in my breast  
 Their struggles will be o'er!  
 Oh, for the day when I shall rest,  
 And never suffer more!

This is asking for nullification—the extreme cry. The philosopher continues in a mystic strain obviously influenced by the Book of Revelation:

I saw a spirit standing, man,  
 Where thou dost stand—an hour ago,  
 And round his feet three rivers ran,  
 Of equal depth, and equal flow—  
 A golden stream—and one like blood;  
 And one like sapphire seemed to be;  
 And where they joined their triple flood  
 It tumbled in an inky sea. . . .

But, looking down, the spirit saw the deeps sparkle white and bright, and the philosopher declares that if he had seen it sooner, he

ne'er had raised this coward cry  
 To cease to think, and cease to be,

nor wished to forget in unwaking repose "conquered good and conquering ill." This poem proves that Emily has gone forward. Her mind is as clear as the upper air. She is wrestling with the problem which is central to ethics and which has agitated human beings since they first began to reason: the problem of the origin and relative power of good and evil.

In her mind that problem was inextricably bound up with love. So in March she wrote the moving "Remembrance," which was Rosina to the dead Julius (as Emily said to make it fit into the Gondal cycle) but which was also

Julius to Rosina—was herself to Louis Parensell or herself to a woman—was any desperate soul to its lost love. The grave was the grave, in other words, and a symbol of permanent separation:

Cold in the earth—and the deep snow piled above thee,  
Far, far removed, cold in the dreary grave!  
Have I forgot, my only Love, to love thee,  
Severed at last by Time's all-severing wave?

Cold in the earth—and fifteen wild Decembers  
From those brown hills, have melted into spring:  
Faithful, indeed, is the spirit that remembers  
After such years of change and suffering!

Sweet Love of youth, forgive, if I forget thee,  
While the world's tide is bearing me along;  
Other desires and other hopes beset me,  
Hopes which obscure, but cannot do thee wrong!

No later light has lightened up my heaven,  
No second morn has ever shone for me;  
All my life's bliss from thy dear life was given,  
All my life's bliss is in the grave with thee.

But when the days of golden dreams had perished,  
And even despair was powerless to destroy,  
Then did I learn how existence could be cherished,  
Strengthened, and fed, without the aid of joy.

And, even yet, I dare not let it languish,  
Dare not indulge in memory's rapturous pain;  
Once drinking deep of that divinest anguish,  
How could I seek the empty world again?<sup>1</sup>

This poem reveals an integrated person and writer who has all but mastered her medium. Her words express what she feels without the meaning being subtly metamorphosed in transit. Fifteen years, one muses. But a number is arbitrary. Fifteen was Rosina's number; Emily knew her own measurement of rejection and despair only too well. It is possible that at the time of publication "fifteen" was adopted deliberately to mislead.

From a contemplation of death Emily had passed to love, and now in April she reverted, in the inspired and beautiful "Death":

Death! that struck when I was most confiding  
In my certain faith of joy to be—  
Strike again, Time's withered branch dividing  
From the fresh root of Eternity!

<sup>1</sup> March 3, 1845.

Leaves, upon Time's branch, were growing brightly,  
 Full of sap, and full of silver-dew;  
 Birds beneath its shelter gathered nightly;  
 Daily round its flowers the wild bees flew.

Sorrow passed, and plucked the golden blossom;  
 Guilt stripped off the foliage in its pride;  
 But, within its parent's kindly bosom,  
 Flowed forever Life's restoring tide.

So her heart had its renaissance; with "tenfold increased blessing spring adorned the beauty-burdened spray" (when she began to defend instead of accuse her way of loving?); but—

Cruel Death! The young leaves droop and languish;  
 Evening's gentle air may still restore—  
 No! the morning sunshine mocks my anguish—  
 Time, for me, must never blossom more!

Strike it down, that other boughs may flourish  
 Where that perished sapling used to be;  
 Thus, at least, its mouldering corpse will nourish  
 That from which it sprung—Eternity.

This poem has a ripe tonality as well as profound meaning. Power is flowing into Emily fast. It is filling the reservoir of her mind with consequential and purifying waters.

How could it have seeped away so completely in "Despair" of April 22, and, having returned in "Child of Delight" of May 28, again disappeared in "Anticipation" of June 2? How, except by the law ofebb and flow?

Nevertheless, an artist has a right to be judged by her best, and Emily's best, that spring of 1845, was a high-water mark. The great seventh-wave was approaching the shore, where it would break.

That is why the poems of this period have been quoted fully: to show (to return to a metaphor used at the beginning of this chapter) that her two and a half years of inward incubation of past experience were about to end, and the fruit—a fully controlled and noble style—emerge.



## XXVI

### SCANDAL AT THE PARSONAGE

THEN Branwell administered a shock, and, as sometimes happens, the birth was hastened and the creature brought forth marked.

But to understand fully the situation in July 1845 it is necessary to retrace our steps. . . .

Branwell had been a disappointment for years, because he had not fulfilled his promise as a painter, and because—late secretary of the Haworth Temperance Society—he was too free with the bottle. But his sisters were still dazzled; his father still doted. Had he not won the respect of Mr. Postlethwaite? If he failed one way he would succeed another, having inexhaustible resources. The young scapegrace took their homage and seasoned it with some of his own. Yet he was not devoid of merit at Sowerby Bridge. Francis Leyland, who accompanied his brother the sculptor to the station one bright Sunday afternoon in the autumn of 1840, to see the young railroad clerk, has described him as a gentleman in appearance. "He was slim and agile in figure, yet well-formed in outline. His complexion was clear and ruddy, and the expression of his face, at the time, lightsome and cheerful. His voice had a ringing sweetness, and the utterance and use of his English was perfect." Sowerby Bridge was a turning point for Branwell, who had both good and bad in him. There had to be a turning point. He was passionate, headlong—once he had driven his doubled fist through the panels of a door. At lonely Sowerby Bridge his future hung in balance; at which crucial hour he was removed to lonelier Luddenden Foot, where the station was a wooden hovel far from any village, and there was nothing to do but drink with "wild, rollicking, hard-headed manufacturers." Francis Grundy, an engineer on the line, befriended him, and was impressed by the qualities which made him rare fine company—and ruined him: an incommensurate brilliance and gnawing eagerness for excitement—any kind of excitement, provided it broke the monotony. Branwell was a little shy when cold sober, which may have constituted another reason for drinking. Drinking like bragging was over-compensation: it made him second to none, lord of all he surveyed. Said Grundy the engineer: "He was insignificantly small—one of his life's trials. He

had a mass of red hair which he wore brushed high off his forehead—to help his height, I fancy.” Grundy recognized the duality in him: the “great, bumpy, intellectual forehead, nearly half the size of the whole facial contour” and “small ferrety eyes, deep sunk and still further hidden by never-removed spectacles;” the fine strong nose and weak jaw and chin; the flashing eye suddenly downcast. He saw him not only at his best, rushing out to snatch some conversation before the fiery train plunged back into the night, but at his worst, after days of debauchery during which he abandoned the station to a stupid porter. Yet Grundy believed in this small, thin, mercurial person believed then, and later, when it was discovered that his account books were falsified and a sum of money missing. Branwell was not accused of embezzling (the porter had that honour) but gross neglect of his duty. How face Papa? He was not without a sense of shame. Grundy has said that once, having driven twelve miles to and from Haworth in a gig, he burst into tears and swore he would mend. Now in his disgrace he still “struggled after the good.” Fortunately for his embarrassment, Charlotte and Emily were in Brussels and Anne at Thorp Green when he so ingloriously “resigned.”<sup>1</sup>

For a while he was home alone, elaborately frittering time by reading up on painting, writing and pugilism—this young man of virtuoso talent, who at the age of thirteen had prefaced *Caractacus, a Dramatic Poem by Young Soult* with this remarkably good dictum: “In dramatic poetry the passions are the chief thing, and in proportion as excellence in the depicting of these is obtained, so the writer . . . takes his place among dramatic authors.”<sup>2</sup> Wordsworth had rebuffed him. But Little Nosey<sup>3</sup> who ran the Black Bull cheered him on in the brown-panelled “snug”<sup>4</sup>; and John Brown joked and jibed and urged another drink; and villagers gaped when on quoting Latin to a newcomer he quickly translated it—as, “*Fiat justitia, ruat coelum*, that means justice must be done though the heavens fall”—followed by an apology, “Excuse me, Sir, but I live among

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 199; II, 47; Leyland, *passim*; Grundy, *passim*; Chadwick, 103.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 45.

<sup>3</sup> The Black Bull was owned by the Sugdens. When taxed with sending for Branwell to entertain his guests, the landlord said: “I never sent for him at all; he came himself, hard though.” (Chadwick, 114.)

<sup>4</sup> The “shots” of the guests were chalked up inside the door of a clock which stood in the corner of the tap room. (*Life and Letters*, I, 200, Note.)

barbarians.”<sup>1</sup> Sometimes he went to see a ninety-five-year-old fortune-teller in Haworth.<sup>2</sup> He was suffering “extreme pain” in body—from what?—as well as mind; so that it was a long time before he could “speak cheerfully and enjoy the company of another without six glasses of whisky.” Perhaps the opium which he now began to take was prescribed by a doctor to ease physical pain—we shall never know. Grundy has testified that before he ever went to Sowerby Bridge Branwell “had been studying De Quincey, and with the obstinate determination of doing himself whatever anyone else had done, positively began the practice of opium-eating. He did this until it became a habit, and when it had seized upon his nervous system, underwent the torture of the damned, or of De Quincey at least.” But he was cured; and this new opium-eating may have been the result of a doctor’s prescription re-awakening a taste for the drug.<sup>3</sup> Certainly he tried his best to get another job. He wrote Leyland: “I only want a motive for exertion to be happier than I have been for years. But I feel my recovery from *almost insanity* to be retarded by having nothing to listen to except the wind moaning among old chimnies and older ash trees . . . no one to speak to except crabbed old Grecks and Romans. . . .” His year at Luddenden Foot seemed in retrospect like a nightmare. And then this manly note: “I would rather give my hand than undergo again the grovelling carelessness, the malignant yet cold debauchery, the determination to find how far mind would carry body without both being chucked into hell. . . .” A job was necessary, but what? He had failed in the arts, and was untrained for anything else. “Yet I have something still left in me which may do me service,” he wrote wistfully. Willy Weightman was at this time a very good influence. Perhaps it was that fickle but otherwise admirable curate who advised his friend to enter the Church; St. Augustine had entered it after a youth no less reckless. The Church? said Branwell with a surge of bitterness; “I have not one mental qualification, save, perhaps, hypocrisy.”<sup>4</sup>

Then Willy Weightman, the good, the esteemed, failed him by dying—not suddenly, but, what was terrible for Branwell who sat by the bed, inch by inch, for two weeks. And Aunt whom he had looked upon as a permanent institution proved the transiency of all things by dying too; leav-

<sup>1</sup> Simpson, 37, 97.

<sup>2</sup> Grundy, 81.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>4</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 263–265.

ing him none of her money, on the assumption that the girls needed it more, which was untrue. What comfort had he but opium fumes and undiluted gin? £200 apiece for the girls—and for him a Japan dressing-box! It was a horrible shock. But Miss Branwell, they explained, had so believed in his brilliance. "Brilliance" . . . the word was mockery.

The prestige of Mr. Brontë, head of Haworth Church and the Brontë family, was zero with his son. In health he had abandoned Branwell to roving and evil companions while he kept to his study; and now, old, ill, and all but sightless, had increased in sorrowful wisdom too late; the coarsening process had gone too far: he could do nothing—nothing.

The three sisters still clung to the idea that their brother was merely engaged in establishing himself, by libertine ways, a man among men. A life-time of idolization is a powerful habit. Did not the fact of being born male bestow privileges? Papa's faults, for instance. Emily, the least sentimental, may have observed that though wittier and more scintillant, Branwell was a softer, more violent, less trustworthy edition of their imperfect parent.

Then it seemed an ideal solution was offered; and Branwell departed for Thorp Green with Anne, to act as gentleman tutor to the only son of the Rev. Edmund Robinson, bed-ridden, and his middle-aged but attractive wife. The Parsonage sighed with relief. Papa paid him the compliment of a visit. Charlotte wrote him a long open-hearted letter from Brussels, asking for a detailed account of how he was getting on with his pupil and the rest of the family ("Tell me everything you can think of"), detailing her own news, as fair exchange, and signing herself, in a renaissance of the old close bond of their sympathetic childhood, "Yourn!"—so happy was she over his being what she called "in good odour."<sup>1</sup>

Even after Charlotte's return from her second Belgian sojourn at Christmas-time 1844 her confidence (and so, we presume, Papa's and Emily's) continued to wax strong. "Anne and Branwell," she wrote Ellen, "have just left us to return to York. They are both wondrously valued in their situations."<sup>2</sup>

But, home on vacation the following summer, Branwell was moody; he moped; on the slightest provocation flared up dangerously. Why? his sisters wondered.<sup>3</sup>

At Christmas he was "quieter and less irritable," but

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 296, 297.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 25.

still, in a subtle and secret way, alienated from himself and them. His oddity was thrown into relief, as spring drew on, by the perfectly normal demeanour of the new curate, Rev. Arthur Bell Nicholls (who had succeeded Mr. Grant, who had succeeded Mr. Smith, who had succeeded Mr. Weightman of fond memory). *Mr. Nicholls* could be predicted. Then Anne began to write home dark allusions; and, when she and Branwell returned from Thorp Green in June, related how she had heard her pupils blackmail their mother into indulgences with the threat: "If you don't, we'll tell Papa about Mr. Brontë." What did that mean? whispered Charlotte. What did it mean? asked Emily aghast. It meant—Anne hated to say it but her mind was so harassed—there was *something between them*. Mr. Robinson being an invalid they had every opportunity. . . . At this point Anne doubtless broke down and cried. Five years ago she had disliked Thorp Green, and now at last had really given notice.<sup>1</sup>

But Branwell departed at the end of a week, saying he would see them when the Robinsons went to Scarborough. As soon as he had gone their suspicions seemed grossly exaggerated; their fears melted like ice into water which in turn evaporates and is seen no more.

Thus, with every chance for preparation, Branwell's family was curiously unprepared for the shock of July 17. A fact has greater felling-power than a conjecture. Never in their darkest imaginations had these virginal young ladies entertained images as terrible as those now forced brutally upon their reluctant consideration.

On June 30 Anne and Emily, reviving an old comradeship, went on a pilgrimage to York Minster. Charlotte had departed June 26 to spend two weeks with Ellen at Hathersage, but a letter from Emily urged her to stay longer:

"Dear Miss Nussey,—If you have set your heart on Charlotte staying another week, she has our united consent. I, for one, will take everything easy on Sunday. I am glad she is enjoying herself; let her make the most of the next seven days to return stout and hearty. Love to her and you from Anne and myself—and tell her all are well at home.

Yours,

E. J. Brontë." <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 34, 35, 39; Robinson, 156.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 40, 41.

Make the most of the next seven days, Haworth Parsonage. All are well at home—but how long will all be well, unhappy household?

On July 17, a Thursday, two things arrived at almost the same time: Branwell sick and dishevelled, and a furious note from Mr. Robinson charging him on pain of exposure never to see or communicate with Mrs. Robinson again. Branwell was like one demented. He had no pride—did not care who heard about his dishonourable proceedings with a woman seventeen years his senior. Glass after glass of whisky ran down his throat. No one in the Parsonage was permitted to rest day or night. When Charlotte arrived two days later she was shocked, and her heart turned to stone against her brother, forever. She could the less forgive an illicit passion, having conquered a temptation to that very thing herself. In reporting to Ellen that they had been obliged to send him to Liverpool and Wales for a week with John Brown as guardian, from whence he had written her his contrition for “frantic folly,” she observed in cool disdain that she doubted his promise to reform. “We must all prepare for a season of distress and disquietude. When I left you I was strongly impressed with the feeling that I was going back to sorrow.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus the effect of Branwell’s deterioration and disgrace on Charlotte. As for sad old Papa, he remembered certain reckless episodes in his own youth, innocent by comparison. Even the new peal of six bells, which he had worked so hard to raise a subscription of £230 for, seemed, suddenly, vanity and folly hanging up there in the Church tower.<sup>2</sup> Anne was piously wounded in her sensibilities. That such corruption should exist in the world, and her brother involved!

What was the effect on Emily?

Two weeks after the violence of Branwell’s home-coming Emily wrote one of her four-yearly diaries; in one corner of which hand-printed page is a pen-drawing of herself with side-curls held up in back by a high comb and a long lank peplum-skirt. She is writing on her knee in the box-room. Keeper lies at her feet, nose between paws, and Flossy is luxuriously ensconced on a bed across the window. Does the Diary give any clue to an alteration in Emily’s feelings and thoughts?

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 43, 57.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 37.

"Haworth, Thursday, July 30th, 1845.

"My birthday—showery, breezy, cool. I am twenty seven years old today. This morning Anne and I opened the papers we wrote four years since, on my twenty-third birthday. This paper we intend, if all be well, to open on my thirtieth—three years hence, in 1848. Since the 1841 paper the following events have taken place"—and she lists the failure of the school scheme and the movements of herself, her sisters, and her brother.

"Anne and I went our first long journey by ourselves together . . . sleeping at York, returning to Keighley Tuesday evening, sleeping there, and walking home on Wednesday. Though the weather was broken we enjoyed ourselves very much, except during a few hours at Bradford." (Query: What happened in Bradford?) "And during our excursion we were, Ronald Macalgin, Henry Angora, Juliet Augusteena, Rosabella Esmaldan, Ella and Julian Egremont, Catherine Navarre, and Cordelia Fitzaphnold, escaping from the palaces of instruction to join the Royalists who are hard driven at present by the victorious Republicans. The Gondals still flourish bright as ever. I am at present writing a book on the First Wars. Anne has been writing some articles on this, and a book by Henry Sophona. We intend sticking firm by the rascals as long as they delight us, which I am glad to say they do at present." (That at twenty-seven she should still be playing at a game commenced in her childhood! The prose book of the First Wars was making her poetry fall off quantitatively.) "We are all in decent health, only that Papa has a complaint in his eyes, and with the exception of B., who, I hope, will be better and do better hereafter. I am quite contented with myself: not as idle as formerly, altogether as hearty, and having learned to make the most of the present and long for the future with less fidgetiness that I cannot do all that I wish; seldom or never troubled with nothing to do, and merely desiring that everybody could be as comfortable as myself and as undespending, and then we should have a very tolerable world of it.

"By mistake I find we have opened the paper on the 31st instead of the 30th. Yesterday was much such a day as this, but the morning was divine.

"Tabby, who was gone in our last paper, is come back, and has lived with us two years and a half, and is in good health. Martha, who also departed, is here too. We have got Flossy; got and lost Tiger; lost the hawk Hero, which, with the geese, was given away, and is doubtless dead, for when I came back from Brussels, I inquired on all hands and could hear nothing of him. Tiger died early last year. Keeper and Flossy are well, also the canary acquired four years since. We are now

all at home, and likely to be there some time. Branwell went to Liverpool on Tuesday to stay a week. Tabby has just been teasing me to turn as formerly to 'Pilloputate.' Anne and I should have picked the black currants if it had been fine and sunshiny. I must hurry off now to my turning and ironing. I have plenty of work on hands, and writing, and am altogether full of business. With best wishes for the whole house till 1848, July 30th, and as much longer as may be,—I conclude.

E. J. Brontë." <sup>1</sup>

Could anything seem fuller or more disarmingly frank? But this is a very misleading document. It is the truth by omissions made woefully untrue.

For years Emily had worn a mask before her family, playing the rôle of an uncomplicated hard-working daughter of the house. No one—not even Anne—had been able to see her as she was; she had meant that no one ever should; and now that the Brontës' tranquil world was breaking up, her determination to live *incognito* was re-enforced. A proof of this, if any further proof were needed, is the fact that immediately following this serene, this almost stolid Diary, she wrote in the secrecy of her room "The Captive's Lament," which begins tragically:

I know that tonight the wind it is sighing,  
The soft August wind, over forest and moor;  
While I in a grave-like chill am lying  
On the damp black flags of my dungeon-floor.<sup>2</sup>

It is a tribute to her strength that she was able to live two lives absolutely different and divorced, simultaneously. But only one had reality for her: the unseen.

Is it strange, then, that her Diary leaves practically unmentioned the bomb-shell of Branwell's dishonour? If Charlotte had been writing a diary, it would have railed against him as her letters to Ellen railed against him: she was thorough in her disillusionment. Emily did not mention his disgrace precisely because she felt it so profoundly. It required a revolutionary adjustment in her mind. It belonged to that other life which was not on display at the Parsonage or in her and Anne's joint-Diary—which was unacknowledged, the better to protect it. The Diary touched him as lightly as possible: he was not in decent health; she hoped he would be better and do better hereafter; he had gone to Liverpool for a week. . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 49-51.

<sup>2</sup> August, 1845.



It is true that gentle Anne is only a little more open about him than Emily:

"How many things have happened since it"—her last Diary—"was written—some pleasant, some far otherwise. . . . During my stay"—with the Robinsons—"I have had some very unpleasant and undreamt-of experience of human nature. . . . Branwell has been a tutor at Thorp Green, and had much tribulation and ill health. . . . We have had so far a very cold, wet summer. . . . Emily is upstairs ironing. I am sitting in the dining-room in the rocking-chair before the fire with my feet on the fender. . . . Emily is engaged in writing the Emperor Julius's life. She has read some of it and I want very much to hear the rest. She is writing some poetry, too. I wonder what it is about? I have begun the third volume of *Passages in the Life of an Individual*. I wish I had finished it. This afternoon I began to set about making my grey figured silk frock that was dyed in Keighley. . . . Emily and I have a great deal of work to do. . . . I want to get a habit of early rising. . . . The Gondals are at present in a sad state. The Republicans are uppermost, but the Royalists are not quite overcome. The young sovereigns, with their brothers and sisters, are still at the Palace of Instruction. The Unique Society, about half a year ago, were wrecked on a desert island as they were returning from Gaul. They are still there, but we have not played at them much yet. The Gondals in general are not in first-rate playing condition." She then speaks of July 1848 and wonders how it will find them, adding, "I for my part cannot be flatter or older in mind than I am now."<sup>1</sup>

Anne is only a little more open than Emily; like Emily, she was moved; like Emily, forgave; like Emily, had too much loyalty to expose—to sell out—her brother. But one discerns vast differences between these three sisters who had each been hopelessly and perversely in love. Charlotte never forgave Branwell. Anne forgave, but negatively. Only Emily forgave positively. Fresh from the hard school of her own thwarted passion she forgave by understanding: by taking his life into her mind and making it part of herself. This does not mean she condoned, holding that Branwell had acted as he should have acted; or in similar circumstances would have done the same. On the contrary, the whole thing horrified her. But as a tendency in herself might horrify her. For she sympathized with the struggle; she knew that those who fail, like those who succeed, are in

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 52, 53.

need of love. Heretofore her character had been enlisted in shadow-tragedies. Even her own love affair had been three-quarters intangible, however solid her imagination tried to make it. Now she was face to face, in daily sight and sound, with a tragedy in no way imagined.

She did not fall short in the crisis. She had been strong for herself; now she was strong for Branwell.

But certain fearful images of her wayward fancy were confirmed. The lightness which time, if not banter or learning, might have recovered for her was irretrievably lost.

## XXVII

### EMILY AS POET

THUS the autumn of 1845 wore on like other autumns, except that the falling leaves seemed more melancholy.<sup>1</sup>

Then one day Charlotte accidentally happened on a manuscript volume of verse in her sister Emily's secret-small calligraphy, and picked it up, and if she felt compunction at looking at what was not intended for her eyes, overcame the feeling. She was amazed. Why, these poems had a very special quality, they were not at all like other women's! Years later she wrote with insight: "I thought them condensed and terse, vigorous and genuine. To my ear they had also a peculiar music, wild, melancholy, and elevating."<sup>2</sup>

When Charlotte praised the poems out loud, Emily went white and stony. Why, those poems were her soul naked! What a dastard intrusion! For a moment she hated Charlotte. She was mute when angry, her face hard as flint. "It took hours to reconcile her to the discovery," Charlotte has testified, "and days to convince her that such poems merited publication. I knew, however, that a mind such as hers could not be without some latent spark of honourable ambition, and refused to be discouraged in my attempts to fan that spark to flame."<sup>2</sup>

"Honourable ambition" was Charlotte's phrase, not Emily's. One suspects that a yearning toward fame had been concealed behind her remark to Henry Nussey five years before: "Do you think I am a blue-stocking? I feel half inclined to laugh at you for the idea."<sup>3</sup> But Emily had no worldly ambition. She was only willing (never enthusiastic) to publish as she might play a game, if it were anonymous; to try in this roundabout and small way to justify her obscure life. In view of her character, the fact that she consented at all would seem to argue that Charlotte had seen only a part and not all of the poems—not the most personal and revealing ones; or that Emily was convinced that, having seen them, Charlotte was obtuse to their meaning, mistaking sorrowful fact for romantic fancy. . . . In any case Emily changed a word here and there, and hid away whole poems, to conceal autobiography. Is it not significant

<sup>1</sup> On October 9 Emily wrote "The Prisoner." See page 153.

<sup>2</sup> Biographical Notice.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 208.

that she omitted "Light Up Thy Halls," and "Loud Without the Wind is Roaring," and "Thy Sun is Near Meridian Height," and "Far Away is Mirth Withdrawn," and "If Grief for Grief Can Touch Thee," and "The Evening Passes Fast Away," and "Love's Contentment"—the most deeply personal? Apparently she felt she could with impunity include "Remembrance" because no one but herself and one other knew of the affair at Law Hill, and "fifteen wild Decembers" was adequate camouflage. And perhaps at this time, and not when she was writing, "he" was in some poems changed to "she," and vice versa.

Charlotte was in a magnanimous mood on her fine critical faculty momentarily weakened when Anne brought out her trite compositions. "Sweet, sincere pathos," she said, thus obligating Anne to admire *her* poems—which Anne forthwith did, whole-heartedly. Finally, we may be sure, committed herself as little as possible.

They talked about pseudonyms for their joint venture. As promoter of the scheme and eldest, Charlotte probably chose hers first: Currer Bell—Currer the surname of a popular author, and Bell the middle name of Papa's sedate new curate: a combination preserving the poet's initials while baffling as to gender. Emily chose Ellis—it is not known why. Anne wondered if Acton would do. One imagines Charlotte affirming with enthusiasm: "Acton will be excellent!"

They did not tell their father, being too modest to reveal their poetic efforts to the author of lines such as

O! when shall we see our dear Jesus  
His presence from poverty frees us. . . .

"We had very early cherished the dream of one day becoming authors," Charlotte wrote four years later. "This dream, never relinquished even when distance divided and absorbing tasks occupied us, now suddenly acquired strength and consistency: it took the character of a resolve."<sup>1</sup> But this dream, we again insist, had been Charlotte's, and she is here up to her old trick of reading her own ideas into others' minds. However, once the three sisters started to try to snare a publisher, it was bound to be a little exciting even for Emily who was all but indifferent to the world—for she was human.

Charlotte discharged a fusillade of letters in every direc-

<sup>1</sup> Biographical Notice.

tion, none of which provoked answers. But for this the conspirators were prepared. At last Messrs. Chambers of Edinburgh sent a "brief and business-like, but civil and sensible reply," advising them to apply to Aylott and Jones, booksellers of 8 Paternoster Row, London; which advice Charlotte seized upon with avidity. "Gentlemen," she wrote on January 28, 1846, "May I request to be informed whether you would undertake the publication of a collection of short poems in 1 vol. oct. If you object to publishing the work at your own risk—would you undertake it on the Author's account?—I am gentlemen, your obdt. hmble. Servt. C. Brontë." Aylott and Jones must have replied immediately, for on January 31 Charlotte wrote in suppressed excitement: "Gentlemen,—Since you agree to undertake the publication . . . I should wish to know as soon as possible the cost of paper and printing. . . . I should like it to be printed in 1 octavo volume of the same quality of paper and size of type as Moxon's last edition of Wordsworth. . . ." And on February 6 after dispatching the bulky manuscript: "Gentlemen . . . You will perceive that the Poems are the work of three persons—relatives—their separate pieces are distinguished by their respective signatures"—concealing the three persons' trepidation. On February 16 she specified duodecimo form, but left the choice of type and size to the superior judgment of the printer; "I only stipulate for *clear* type—not too small—and good paper." On February 21, then, a draft for £31 10s. was sent off—and each sister was a little more than £10 poorer. All through March they corrected proofs sent in broken lots, with scrupulous exactitude, for as Charlotte said, "*tumbling* stars instead of *trembling* would suffice to throw an air of absurdity over a whole poem." Then Messrs. Aylott and Jones were puzzled to receive the following, written March 28: "Gentlemen,—As the proofs have hitherto always come safe to hand under the direction of C. Brontë Esq.—I have not thought it necessary to request you to change it, but a little mistake having occurred yesterday—I think it will be better for you to send them to me in future under my real address which is Miss Brontë." Had old James Feather the postman become too curious, or had Papa?<sup>1</sup>

What joyful suspense, waiting for their book! The suspense had been so prolonged, by now it pressed outward

<sup>1</sup> Biographical Notice; *Life and Letters*, II, 79–85.

like the powerful beating of a heart against enclosing ribs. It had made time drag and time leap forward; had made bearable the unchecked decay of Branwell's moral nature, which went on under the same roof they slept under, ate under, and nourished their pathetic hopes under, through the autumn and winter. Liverpool and Wales had not helped Branwell. "I found," he wrote Leyland, "that wherever I went a certain woman robed in black, and calling herself 'Misery' walked by my side, and leant on my arm as affectionately as if she were my legal wife." About this time he is supposed to have met Mrs. Robinson at Harrogate<sup>1</sup> and persuaded her to wait till her invalid husband died and left her his estate—instead of eloping now. Anyway, he tried to communicate with her by putting a poem of *doubl'entendre* in the *Halifax Guardian* under his pseudonym "Northangerland."<sup>2</sup> Charlotte, watching his extravagances, wrote Ellen: "My hopes ebb now indeed about Branwell—I sometimes fear he will never be fit for much—his bad habits seem more deeply rooted than I thought—The late blow to his prospects and feelings has quite made him reckless. It is only absolute want of means that acts as any check to him. . . ." A little later she reported him somewhat better "because he is now *forced* to abstain." And later: "Branwell makes no effort to seek a situation, and while he is at home"—Charlotte was apologizing—"I will invite no one to come and share our discomfort." And again: "I wish I could say one word to you in his favour, but I cannot. . . ." And again: "You say well in speaking of Branwell that no sufferings are so awful as those brought on by dissipation—alas! I see the truth of this observation daily proved. . . ." Such was the back-drop to the little private drama of Messrs. Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell—a back-drop incongruous and inappropriate; as if an unskilled director, in haste and carelessness, had used the wrong screen. . . .<sup>3</sup>

In February 1846 Ellen received another one of Emily's stiff notes, embodying the family's genial permission for Charlotte to prolong a visit. Returning March 3 Charlotte walked home from Keighley by the "old road"—missing Emily and Anne who had gone to meet her by the new. She reached the Parsonage at two; Emily and Anne at four-thirty, soaked to the skin. In consequence of this mis-

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, IV, 217.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 72, and Note; IV, 217; Robinson, 164.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 57-60, 66, 74.

adventure Anne, who was delicate, caught cold; but Emily, constitutionally strong, suffered no indisposition. What to her was a heavy shower of rain? For years she had walked on the moors in all weathers.

About an hour after she arrived home Charlotte entered the room where Branwell was. "It was very forced work to address him," she wrote Ellen with peculiar lack of reticence. "I might have spared myself the trouble as he took no notice and made no reply—he was stupefied—My fears were not vain. Emily tells me that he got a sovereign from Papa while I have been away under the pretence of paying a pressing debt—and has employed it as was to be expected—she concluded her account with saying he was a hopeless being—it is too true. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Several commentators have assumed that because Emily said "Branwell is a hopeless being" she too had turned against him. This does not follow. "Hopeless" can be taken two ways: it can mean "warranting no hope in others," or, "having no hope oneself"—and it is quite possible that Emily used the word in the latter sense. But even if she meant it in the former sense, it can have been nothing more than the hasty word of a moment. For all the evidence before and after this scene points to an unflagging loyalty on her part, amounting almost to aiding and abetting. For instance, there is a firmly-established legend in Haworth that when Mr. Brontë groped to the front door of the Black Bull to demand his reprobate son, Emily flying down the back way between tombstones warned her brother by knocking on the window of the tap-room, so that, escaping through the window, he could beat his father home. Many nights she sat up waiting, austere-ly charitable, after the rest of the family were in bed, while the fire died on the hearth and the shadows on the floor grew ungainly; many a night, while he abused her with words, assisted him up the stairs. . . . Charlotte has said that the whole sporting venture into book-publishing gave "a wonderful zest to living"—and so it may have done, for her. But Emily with her true sense of values was fabricated otherwise. A book of verse, however interesting as one's anonymous *debut* to the world, could not make life "wonderful" while one's brother was in process of being destroyed. "*There*," Charlotte wrote Ellen—"there is no change but for the worse;"

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 84.

adding, "At home he is a drain on every resource—an impediment to all happiness."<sup>1</sup>

At the end of May there arrived three copies of *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*, bound in cloth and addressed to Miss C. Brontë; and, soon after, in ironical juxtaposition, Mrs. Robinson's coachman with a note for Branwell. It was as if fate begrudged the sisters a single unmixed pleasure. For the note from Mrs. Robinson shattered Branwell's hope that at Mr. Robinson's death he would be given as he phrased it to Leyland and Grundy, "herself and estate." According to Branwell's account, which now can never be verified, the note said she could not see him because her husband's will was so worded that if she did she would forfeit her inheritance. Was this only one of the many distortions of Branwell's brain, or that flirtatious lady's method of getting rid of Branwell's burdensome attentions? For the probated will contained no such clause. In any case if Branwell had been irresponsible before, he was now reckless. When he had first heard of Mr. Robinson's death he had "fairly danced down the churchyard . . . he was so fond of that woman." But this morning, just as, carefully dressed, he was setting off on a journey, Mrs. Robinson's coachman, arriving post-haste, summoned him into the Black Bull. After the coachman's departure, the inn-maid Anne heard "a strange noise, a bleating like a calf's," but thought nothing of it till, hours later, she found Branwell on the floor of the wainscoted parlour, altered and frightful-looking. He recovered his stupefied senses, but not a modicum of philosophy. All he thought of, from then on, was to procure by bribe, threat or trickery another glassful of the fiery liquid which stunned; another round of stultifying opium.<sup>2</sup> It seems strange that this person had once written a poem as good and innocent as the following:

So where He reigns in glory bright,  
Above those starry skies of night,  
Amid His paradise of light,  
Oh, why may I not be?

Oft when awake on Christmas morn,  
In sleepless twilight laid, forlorn,  
Strange thoughts have o'er my mind been borne,  
How He has died for me;

<sup>1</sup> Robinson, 167, 168; private research; *Life and Letters*, II, 86.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 94-97; Robinson, 193-195.



And oft, within my chamber lying,  
 Have I awaked myself with crying  
 From dreams, where I beheld Him dying  
 Upon the accursed tree.

And often has my mother said,  
 While on her lap I laid my head,  
 She feared for Time I was not made,  
 But for Eternity.

Branwell had come a long way.

On May 7 Emily held her copy of *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* between her two hands for a long time; then wrote her name in front, and at the end of each poem by "E. B." its respective date. Though she uses the condescending word "immature," Charlotte says very truly that Emily's were the only poems therein of real merit. Emily was not proud. Admiring the highest, she felt the discrepancy between her efforts and that highest. And yet she could not have thought her poems worthless. As Charlotte was to write to Ellen in another connection: "Talented people almost always know full well the excellence that is in them." . . . But what would the reviewers say—*Blackwood's*, the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Literary Gazette*, the *Critic*, the *London Times*, and the nine or ten other publications to which the little book "done up in the style of Moxon's duo-decimo edition of Wordsworth" had been donated?<sup>1</sup>

At last, on July 4, the *Athenæum* printed a short notice entitled "Poetry for the Million," in which a discerning reviewer rated Ellis highest of the three "brothers": "a fine, quaint spirit" with "evident power of wing that may reach heights not here attempted," since his poems "convey an impression of originality beyond what his contributions to these volumes embody." Currer was assigned second place.<sup>2</sup>

The *Critic* was more general, saying in part: "They in whose hearts are chords strung by Nature to sympathize with the beautiful and the true, will recognize in these compositions the presence of more genius than it was supposed this utilitarian age had devoted to the loftier exercises of the intellect." Charlotte was so enchanted she wrote Aylott and Jones to raise by £10 the £2 previously allotted to advertising, provided this extract from the *Critic* be quoted.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 88, 93; Robinson, 188; Biographical Notice.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 102.

No more was heard. Only two copies were sold. A Mr. F. Enoch of Corn Market, Warwick, desired through Aylott and Jones the favour of the autographs of the Messrs. Bell, and was accommodated. Emily's signature was less ornate and more individual than Charlotte's; and more mature than Anne's. They asked Aylott and Jones to post their letter to Mr. Enoch from London; then waited for further developments; of which there were none.<sup>1</sup>

Their poems had fallen on barren ground; as their affections had not prospered: Charlotte's for Monsieur Liéger, whose one letter had requested that she confine her correspondence, please, to once every six months; Anne's for Mr. Weightman, who had looked at her out of the corner of his eye and then gone away forever;<sup>2</sup> and Emily's, the most scaring.

And yet Emily's twenty-one poems were the vague outline (like a figure seen before daylight) of one of the greatest women poets of the world. With the exception of "The Philosopher," "Remembrance," a passage from "The Prisoner," "How Clear She Shines," "Death," "The Old Stoic," and a few others—whether through Charlotte's misjudgment or her own—this selection was not the best possible. Granted that some of the savage brilliant lines written before 1846 had to be omitted for autobiographical and private reasons, why omit those condensed, isolated, sharp and beautiful quatrains: "Woods ye need not frown

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 103, 104.

<sup>2</sup> There is reason to believe that Anne's poem "A Reminiscence," of April 1844 (like "In Memory of a Happy Day in February" of 1842, and "Severed and Gone," of April 1847, and "Farewell to Thee But Not Farewell," also of 1847) was written to William Weightman:

Yes, thou art gone! and never more  
Thy sunny smile shall gladden me;  
But I may pass the old church door,  
And pace the floor that covers thee,

May stand upon the cold, damp stone,  
And think that, frozen lies below  
The lightest heart that I have known,  
The kindest I shall ever know.

Yet, though I cannot see thee more,  
'Tis still a comfort to have seen;  
And though thy transient life is o'er,  
'Tis sweet to think that thou hast been.

To think a soul so near divine,  
Within a form so angel fair,  
United to a heart like thine  
Has gladdened once our humble sphere.

on me," and "Wildly rushed the mountain spring," and "Twas one of those dark, cloudy days," and "There are two trees in a lonely field," and "What is that smoke . . .?" and "The wind is rough"?

Indeed why omit "No Coward Soul," written January 2, 1846<sup>1</sup> (after a long fallow period), in plenty of time to be included in the manuscript which Aylott and Jones received February 6? "No Coward Soul" is Emily at her purest, most puissant and most characteristic. It has the inevitability of the ultimate; though not all the stanzas are of equal merit, they give a general impression of difficult and elusive truths captured by a net of words in the only way they could have been captured. The whole is a cleaving through the foul air of earth to the high, unsullied, Platonic air of the empyrean. It is Emily losing her soul in a mystic at-one-ness with God, that she may find it forever. It is a creedless creed affirmed in the teeth of the wind:

No coward soul is mine,  
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere:  
I see Heaven's glories shine,  
And Faith shines equal, arming me from Fear.

O God within my breast  
Almighty, ever-present Deity!  
Life, that in me has rest  
As I, undying Life, have power in Thee!

Vain are the thousand creeds  
That move men's hearts: unutterably vain;  
Worthless as withered weeds,  
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main,

To waken doubt in one  
Holding so fast by Thy infinity,  
So surely anchored on  
The steadfast rock of Immortality.

With wide-embracing love  
Thy spirit animates eternal years,  
Pervades and broods above,  
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates, and rears.

Though earth and moon were gone,  
And suns and universes ceased to be,  
And Thou wert left alone,  
Every existence would exist in Thee.

There is not room for Death,  
Nor atom that his might could render void:  
Thou—Thou art Being and Breath  
And what Thou art may never be destroyed.

<sup>1</sup> January 23, in one manuscript.

This poem fulfils the promise in

Cold, clear and blue the morning heaven  
Expands its arch on high . . .

which Emily wrote in July 1836, at the age of eighteen. The perfecting of her poetry had been concomitant with the perfecting of her character and had required ten years, for she was now nearly twenty eight. Meanwhile a weighty sheaf had grown weightier: some good poems, some bad, some merely conventional, some faintly sentimental, some awkward, some beautiful, some tremendous and living, some dead—a very uneven output. But the end has justified the means. Even the poor poems seem glorified in retrospect. One finds even in them a hint of Emily's essential quality: a tender fierceness, an unadorned profundity.

## XXVIII

### EMILY AS NOVELIST

It is not known when Emily started *Wuthering Heights* or how much time it consumed.

As we have seen, her Diary of July 30, 1845, mentions that she was then engaged in writing a "work on the First Wars" and was "altogether full of business." Anne, on the same day, evidently referring to the same "book," called it a Life of the Emperor Julius. Was this in any way connected with *Wuthering Heights*? Only indirectly, like all of the great Gondal cycle played out in poetry and prose; for both had passion, betrayal, exile and revenge for themes—even as Emily's life. In that sense the Gondal cycle was the mighty and indispensable precursor. No doubt if we possessed it in its entirety, instead of a few poetic fragments, we would find in it all the movements and spiritual implications of *Wuthering Heights*, though none of that novel's particularities. Gondaland was a dark country, Heathcliff's Yorkshire still darker; for Emily habitually drew breath in a tragic region.

Since 1843 people had been able to buy stationery in Haworth, but the dealer had so little capital he often walked the ten miles to Bradford to get only enough for the "Brontë girls," who were, he said later, "so gentle and kind and so very quiet." It is presumed that *Wuthering Heights*, like *Jane Eyre*, *Shirley* and *Villette*, was written in unlined blank books, about seven-by-nine, with stiff pasteboard covers marbled in red, navy blue and brown.

On April 6, 1846, Charlotte wrote Messrs. Aylott and Jones: "Gentlemen,—C. E. and A. Bell are now preparing for the Press a work of fiction, consisting of three distinct and unconnected tales. . . . It is not their intention to publish these tales on their own account."<sup>1</sup>

Between July 30, 1845, then, and April 6, 1846, Emily commenced *Wuthering Heights*; and some time between April 6, 1846 and the following November or December, when it was finally accepted, finished it. From her necessity to wind up the life of the Emperor Julius before embarking on a new project, and from the likelihood that publication of verse suggested the more remunerative publication of novels, Emily did not begin *Wuthering Heights* before 1846,

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 87.

and probably not before February. From its long odyssey before being accepted late in the year, it was finished in the late summer or early autumn. Which argues, if it does not prove, that one of the greatest novels in the world, and absolutely the greatest novel by any woman—a work of well over a hundred thousand words—was written in about six months! Indeed it bears internal evidence of having been struck out on a forge blown white-hot by a mighty draught.

Did the details of this closely-constructed story <sup>1</sup> have a source independent of Emily's fancy? Three have been suggested as possible:<sup>2</sup> the story of malevolent Jack Sharp wrecking the fortunes of the Walker family, which Emily heard at Law Hill; the spectacle of Branwell's degeneration; and *The Entail* by the romanticist E. A. T. Hoffman, whose *Tales* Emily read in German. It may be said in brief refutation: first, that the story of Jack Sharp, though it doubtless lingered in her mind as an example of unscrupulosity, is too slight to have served as a model for the elaborate motivation of *Wuthering Heights*; second, that though Branwell dramatically illustrated the power of evil and so helped to confirm Emily's melancholy mood, his temptation and fall will not account for the details of a story in many respects totally dissimilar; and, third, that *The Entail* and *Wuthering Heights*, while resembling each other in the mechanism of property inheritance, in foreboding supernatural atmosphere, in certain parallel characters (Roderick and Heathcliff, old Daniel and Joseph, and, vaguely, Celestina and Cathie), and in their circuitous and somewhat awkward initial pages, in other respects resemble each other about as much as a feeble electric light bulb, turned on and off, resembles a stroke of chain lightning. This does not mean that Emily was not stirred by *The Entail*. Its beginning—"On the bleak shore of the Baltic Sea, between the towns of Bernburg and Rovicenne, is situated the old family mansion of the Barons von Roland-sitten. The immediate environs are wild and desolate. . . ." must have reminded her of Yorkshire—for a country is a

<sup>1</sup> Sanger, *in toto*.

<sup>2</sup> Four, counting the fantastic theory that the Rev. Brontë's forbears in Ireland furnished not only the prototype of Heathcliff but a model for the action of the novel. (Wright, *passim*; Mackay, 97-123.) Five, counting Sir W. Robertson Nicoll's suggestion of Banim's sketches of Irish peasantry as a possible influence. (Nicoll, *Introduction*, XXXVIII and XXXIX.)

quality more than a locality. Nevertheless a world separates Hoffman from Emily Brontë. So one is still far from identifying Heathcliff, whom Charlotte with a note of patronage was to call "unredeemed." None of these suggestions have discovered him. One might as reasonably contend that Varney, that "personification of consummate villainy" with the "dark and profoundly artful mind" in *Kenilworth*, which Emily had read at fifteen, was his true antecedent and begetter.<sup>1</sup>

Then to what does *Wuthering Heights* owe its existence? Did Emily invent the whole plot and all the characters? Did she find it—to use Branwell's observation to Wordsworth—"very edifying and profitable to create a world out of her own brain, and people it with inhabitants, who were so many Melchisedecs, and had no father or mother but her own imagination"?<sup>2</sup> No. She used a source, and a rich one: her own life, her own thoughts, her own desires and frustrations. *Wuthering Heights* is a tremendous allegory, by the writing of which Emily shrived herself of her "sin" as a penitent bathes in icy water at the hour of death. . . .

But first to review, with a bare synopsis, the plot of *Wuthering Heights*:

The first four chapters are an introduction, in which Mr. Lockwood, tenant of Thrushcross Grange, visits the farm of *Wuthering Heights* ("wuthering" in Yorkshire means blustering); is taken aback by the rudeness of the landlord Mr. Heathcliff and his beautiful daughter-in-law; and, caught in a snowstorm, compelled to sleep that night in a long-unused oak closet; in the course of which he dreams that a Catherine Earnshaw, or Linton, or Heathcliff, whose name he had found scrawled in mildewed books on the window-ledge, scratches at the fir-scraped pane, sobbing, "Let me in—let me in! . . . I'm come home. I'd lost my way on the moor!" Mr. Lockwood is terrified by her obscure face, and, unable to shake off her cold hand, rubs her wrist back and forth on broken glass. But the doleful cry keeps up: "Twenty years! I've been a waif for twenty years!" The noise brings Heathcliff, who flies into a rage; and the guest, retreating under orders, accidentally witnesses "a piece of superstition." Getting on to the bed, and wrenching open the lattice, Heathcliff bursts into a passionate fit of tears. "Come in! come in! Cathy, do come. Oh do—*once* more! Oh my heart's darling! hear me *this* time; Catherine, at

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, I, 211.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 109.

last!" So Mr. Lockwood, fleeing back to Thrushcross Grange, takes the first opportunity of sounding the house-keeper Ellen Dean about his landlord Heathcliff, whom she characterizes as "rough as a saw-edge and hard as whinstone—the less you meddle with him the better." "Do you know anything of his history?" asks Lockwood. "It's a cuckoo's, sir." The rest of the book is Nelly's gossip during four weeks of snowy weather, while Mr. Lockwood lies ill of a feverish cold. . . .

In the late summer of 1771 (this was 1801) Mr. Earnshaw of bleak Wuthering Heights had brought home a black haired urchin picked up starving on the streets of Liverpool who was immediately persecuted by young Hindley, heir of the house, but adored by Catherine, Hindley's sister. Mrs. Earnshaw died two years later, and four years after that Mr. Earnshaw. Hindley, coming home from college for the funeral, brought with him his doted-upon bride Frances; and when she expressed a dislike of the dark Heathcliff (named after an Earnshaw who died in infancy) Hindley's former hatred was revived and aggravated, and, as the new master of Wuthering Heights, he drove Heathcliff to the kitchen, and henceforth, in brutally tyrannical manner, worked him like a servant. But Heathcliff was not unhappy, for Cathy taught him what she learned and together, ecstatic little barbarians, they explored the moors. One day, running as far as Thrushcross Grange, they peeked through the window, and were dazzled by crimson carpet, crimson upholstery and a chandelier of glass-drops pouring from a pure-white gold-bordered ceiling. Within were Edgar and Isabella Linton, of about their own age, quarrelling. Heathcliff and Cathy laughed, and Edgar and Isabella in a fright called Papa and Mamma, who, fearing thieves, loosed a bulldog. Skulker bit Cathy's bare ankle (she had lost her shoe in the bog), and she was carried into the house, and, along with "that Lascar, or American or Spanish castaway," recognized. Five weeks she remained at Thrushcross Grange, petted and pampered; and on her return boasted a beaver hat with a feather, and a grand plaid silk frock, and hands whitened by doing nothing; and Hindley cried, "Why, Cathy, you are quite a beauty!" She was changed, but loved Heathcliff no less; only, now when the young Lintons called, Heathcliff was jealous, and Cathy, comparing his uncouthness with their elegance, critical. In remorse for dourness, Heathcliff screwed up courage to say to Ellen



Dean (general factotum at Wuthering Heights): "Nelly, make me decent, I'm going to be good;" and to comfort him for not being as handsome as Edgar Linton, as she helped him wash and comb Nelly said: "You're fit for a prince in disguise. Who knows but what your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian queen, each of them able to buy up, with one week's income, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange together?" But Hindley caught Heathcliff in the living-room and in fury banished him to the garret. Cathy could enjoy nothing till she had crept upstairs and found him. The next summer Hindley's son Hareton was born, and soon afterwards his wife Frances died of consumption; whereupon Hindley cursed God and took to flagrant dissipation. His treatment of Heathcliff being "enough to make a fiend of a saint," the outcast became more and more sullen and ferocious; while Cathy bloomed. "At fifteen she was queen of the countryside; she had no peer; and she did turn out a haughty, headstrong creature!" Thus time wore on; and then one day the spiritless Edgar proposed and was accepted; and Cathy, in the kitchen confiding her secret to Nelly Dean, failed to see Heathcliff on the other side of the settle, away from the fire, brooding. Nelly asked her if she loved Edgar and was told, "Of course." Nelly asked why. Cathy gave a number of reasons: he was handsome and young and cheerful, and he loved her, and was rich, and she would like being the foremost lady in the neighbourhood. "All seems smooth and easy," said Nelly sarcastically. "Where is the obstacle?" "*Here!* and *here!*" cried Catherine, striking her forehead and breast: "in whichever place the soul lives. In my soul and in my heart, I'm convinced I'm wrong!" Trying to give Nelly "a feeling of how I feel," she said that once she dreamed she was in heaven, but heaven did not seem to be her home and she broke her heart with weeping to return to earth; till the angels were so angry they flung her out into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights, where she woke sobbing for joy. "I've no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven . . ." but "it would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now," she said, "so he shall never know how much I love him: and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am." Meanwhile, when he heard her say it would degrade her to marry him, Heathcliff had slipped out of the kitchen. Nelly asked Cathy if she had considered how Heathcliff

would bear being quite deserted. Cathy answers in one of the most beautiful explications of love ever written: "He quite deserted! we separated! . . . He'll be as much to me as he has been all his lifetime. . . . If all else perished, and *he* remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger. . . . Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff! He's always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being." But she had not yet learned that body and soul must never be divorced. Heathcliff did not return. When Nelly told Cathy he had overheard the first part of her confession, Cathy was frantic, and hatless and shawl-less went calling him till after midnight, against the wind and soaked by a thunderstorm—so that she caught a dangerous fever. Mr. and Mrs. Linton fetched her to Thrushcross Grange to nurse her—and caught the ailment and died of it. Still Heathcliff did not come back; and after three years Catherine Earnshaw married Edgar Linton at Gimmerton Chapel. . . . Six months later Heathcliff reappeared: a tall man now, no longer ignorant and not undistinguished; and was deliriously welcomed by Cathy—though not by Linton—at Thrushcross Grange. Having struggled for three years to overcome his boorishness, he had come back with the intention of killing Hindley, for revenge, and then himself. Cathy's welcome changed his plans—while his eyes drank from hers an "undisguised delight." There were many forms of revenge. He would stay on at Wuthering Heights where he was lodged, and drink with the debauched Hindley, and, inch by inch, by gambling, get Wuthering Heights mortgaged to himself. Then Isabella Linton fell in love with him, and a still richer revenge was suggested—for Isabella was Edgar's heir to Thrushcross Grange. One day in accumulated wrath Linton forbade Heathcliff the house; and Cathy, quarrelling with Linton, in one of her rages shut herself up in her room, refusing food and drink. Linton in his study feigned indifference; and Ellen Dean, unconscious precipitator of terrible results, did not tell him her mistress was genuinely ill—having decided that Miss Cathy "needed a good lesson." On the third day Cathy unbarred her door and desired water and gruel, for, she said, she believed she was dying. Nelly, interpreting this speech as meant for Edgar's ears, was obdurate, in spite of the "ghastly countenance and strange exaggerated manner." Cathy, never strong since the fever

of three years ago, and now further undermined by pregnancy and a tragic sorrow, hovered on the edge of dementia. Tearing the pillow with her teeth, she lifted herself up in feverish bewilderment, and though it was mid-winter begged Nelly to open the window; which Nelly would not. Then Cathy pulled feathers from the rents, ranging them on the sheet according to colour and kind. "That's a turkey's, and this is a wild duck's; and this is a pigeon's. Ah, they put pigeons' feathers in the pillows—no wonder I couldn't die! . . ." And her delirium increasing, "Oh, if I were but in my own bed in the old house!" she said bitterly. "And that wind sounding in the firs by the lattice. Do let me feel it—it comes straight down the moor—do let me have one breath!" To pacify her Nelly held the casement ajar for a few seconds, while a cold blast rushed through. Cathy lay still, her face bathed in tears . . . till new delusions seized on her brain. . . . "Oh, I'm burning! I wish I were out of doors! I wish I were a girl again, half savage, and hardy, and free. . . . Open the window wide: fasten it open!" . . . At last Linton came; and she defied the husband she had never loved for the man she could never help loving: When he spoke of Heathcliff: "Hush! Hush, this moment! You mention that name and I end the matter instantly by a spring from the window! What you touch at present you may have; but my soul will be on that hill-top before you lay hands on me again. . . ." This scene ushered in brain fever, from which Cathy recovered, but with her reason hung in perilous balance. Meanwhile, to spite Edgar, Heathcliff had eloped with Isabella; but Edgar was too troubled about Cathy to care much. Ellen, visiting Isabella at Wuthering Heights, found a broken-spirited slattern, and was cajoled into carrying a letter from Heathcliff to Catherine, appointing a meeting; which took place one Sunday when all the household except Ellen were at Church. A strange love-scene. Heathcliff, seeing death in Cathy's face, accused her of bringing this disaster upon them; while she accused him; and they both expressed love in accents despairing, pure and terrible—like nothing else in the English language. " 'Do I want to live? What kind of living will it be when you—oh God! would *you* like to live with your soul in the grave?' . . . 'Let me alone. Let me alone,' sobbed Cathy. 'If I've done wrong, I'm dying for it. . . . I forgive you. Forgive me!'" Linton interrupted the fearful interview, and Cathy fainted and henceforth

recognized no one. That night the second Catherine was born, and two hours later the mother died. Nelly Dean, going to the larches beside which Heathcliff had waited all night, was met by the words: "She's dead. I've not waited for you to learn that. . . . How did——?" Her life, said Ellen, closed in a gentle dream—"may she wake as kindly in the other world!" " 'May she wake in torment!' he cried, with frightful vehemence, stamping his foot and groaning in a sudden paroxysm of ungovernable passion. 'Why, she's a liar to the end! Where is she? Not *there*—not in heaven—not perished—where? . . . And I pray one prayer—I repeat it till my tongue stiffens—Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living! . . . Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad! only *do* not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you!' . . . He dashed his head against the knotted trunk, and lifting up his eyes, howled, not like a man, but like a savage beast being goaded to death. . . . I observed several splashes of blood about the bark of the tree, and his hand and forehead were both stained."

In a sense that is the end of the story. The book runs to twice that length, but never again is so high a pitch of emotion portrayed. Yet, spiritually, it has to be so; spiritually the story is sustained. Because consequences tangible and intangible must be followed out inexorably. Only thus could a profound meaning be made plain. So——

After three months of married life Isabella escaped to the South of England, where her puny son Linton Heathcliff was born; and, Hindley Earnshaw dying, Heathcliff took possession of Wuthering Heights. Thirteen years later Isabella died, and poor Linton Heathcliff was fetched back to Wuthering Heights. The younger Catherine, meeting him accidentally, pitied him, and (spurred on by Heathcliff, who saw their union as the means whereby he could acquire all the Linton as well as Earnshaw property) married him. Then Catherine's father, Edgar, died, unaware of young Catherine's ruin; and, shortly thereafter, her husband, Linton, died too. At this time occurred the interlude related in the introduction: Mr. Lockwood, spending the night at Wuthering Heights, had a dream, and witnessed Heathcliff's outburst at the ghost of Cathy; and returning to Thrushcross Grange, heard the story up to now. But this is not the end. Hareton, an Earnshaw, not a Heathcliff, by the pre-eminence of right completely dis-

rupts Heathcliff's vengeful plans by falling in love with, and being ardently loved in return by, the younger Catherine. But Heathcliff is already mazed; he cannot eat nor sleep; and just before Catherine and Hareton marry, he dies in the midst of the old rhapsodic bitter hallucination, now more intense than ever, of almost—*almost!*—seeing and touching Cathy. Ellen Dean discovers him lying on his back, in bed. "His eyes met mine so keen and fierce. . . . I could not think him dead: but his face and throat were washed with rain." He was buried beside Cathy and Linton; and soon the country-folk were saying his ghost walked abroad. One evening a little shepherd-boy cried because his lambs were skittish and would not be guided. "'There's Heathcliff and a woman yonder, under t' Nab,' he blubbered, 'un' I darnut pass 'em.'" Then Mr. Lockwood the tenant, who began the story, ends it, looking at the three headstones on the slope by the moor: "I lingered round them, under that benign sky: watched the moths fluttering among the heath and hare-bells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass, and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth."

It is a tranquil end for so violent a story, yet the only possible end. No synopsis, by quoting an occasional passage, can give any intimation of the beauty of the whole. The imagination which informs it is peculiarly Celtic, in that it is constantly aware of another world behind this world's turbulence, and of another self "unaccountable, defiant and titanic," and of the mystery of nature, and far origins, and great and sorrowful destinies.

The style is strong and unimpeded: like the striding along of a virile young man. It has a kind of lean, muscled suppleness; there is no *fat*. Swinburne spoke truth when he said, "The book is what it is because the author was what she was." Yes: defects of character make for tricks of style. There are no tricks of style in *Wuthering Heights*. It is noble throughout: not noble on purpose, but inevitably; noble without trying. However isolated her upbringing and limited her opportunities, Emily was incapable of anything underbred.

Thus the book is autobiography in the deepest sense; like some of the poems, autobiography transposed and renamed and dramatized, but no less autobiography. Again, when one repeats a theme over and over, it is safe to assume one is

deeply involved in it. *Wuthering Heights* is the history of Emily's soul in its earth-pilgrimage.

For Emily, in the scheme of correspondences in this allegory that is autobiography, is, without a shadow of doubt, Heathcliff. But since a personality is multiple and (as is well known) a novelist often splits his personality to form not one but several characters, Emily in her superficial and acquired aspects partakes a little of the nature of Cathy and even Ellen Dean. But her fundamental and tragic self, the self which she had hidden from her family and which had caused all the trouble, was Heathcliff.

Her recognition of this dark entity within her had been gradual. One traces it clearly through the poems; one sees that, having fully recognized him at last, she was fascinated and loved him; and then, when she realized he was bent on usurping and destroying her, drew away; but later was reconciled, and defended and encouraged him, and accepted—and even while she lamented gloried in—her tragic fate. Heathcliff is “the mournful boy” of the poems, who “never caused a smile of joy:” “the only being whose doom no tongue would ask, no eye would mourn”: the “iron man” who thinks at the end:

Dark falls the fear of this despair  
On spirits born of happiness;  
But I was bred the mate of care,  
The foster-child of sore distress.

No sighs for me, no sympathy,  
No wish to keep my soul below;  
The heart is dead in infancy,  
Unwept-for let the body go . . .<sup>1</sup>

But Emily the author, watching with temporary semi-detachment the decline of herself the character, and roused to a sense of delicate pathos, sees, as a mother sees, the child in the man:

Farewell, unblest'd, unfriended child,  
I cannot bear to watch thee die!<sup>2</sup>

If then, in his primary aspect, Heathcliff is Emily, who, in their primary aspects, are the other main characters in *Wuthering Heights*? While allowing for the exaggerations, suppressions and transmutations licensed by the fiction form even when it conceals autobiography, one reaches

<sup>1</sup> “At Castle Wood.”

<sup>2</sup> “A Farewell to Alexandria.”

an opinion, and it is best to speak one's opinion boldly. I believe Cathy is the one Emily loved in Law Hill days and never could forget. Hindley is Branwell, favoured of fortune, who does not need to be annihilated because in his weakness he annihilates himself. The Lintons, part and parcel, are the world and the world's attitude, which have weaned her beloved away. Ellen Dean is Charlotte, with a sane head on her shoulders, but now (in unconscious judgment) relegated to an inferior position.

With so much clear, the significance of the drama becomes clear too. Emily is saying that she was and is an outcast. By stressing that Heathcliff and Cathy were temperamentally alike, she may be representing symbolically an intimate fact about peculiar proclivities. As in the poems, her love deserted and so betrayed her, at the instigation of the world; and Hindley or Branwell with his preëminence of position (heir, in the book; only-son, in life) was what she longed to be, so that she hated and at one time wanted to hurt him; but he hurt himself; and she found, in time, that she hated no one any more. She accuses her love, and is accused in turn, and there is, and can be, no end to their suffering till all is purged.

Though separated, they seek each other without pause. It is a remarkable thing about *Wuthering Heights* that after Cathy dies her almost-presence is ever and acutely felt. Indeed right there lies the absolute uniqueness of *Wuthering Heights*. Cathy is so much more than the sum of her acts, as Heathcliff is so much more than the sum of his. They both do wrong, but continue, with supernatural beauty, to live on a higher plane; there, and there only, Emily makes one feel, is their true being: like time, like the material world, infernal acts are relative, they cannot abide, in the last analysis are illusory. . . . This is not because Cathy's and Heathcliff's love is immortal and unphysical, but their love is unphysical and immortal *because this is*.

At Cathy's death, except in the general sense of Heathcliff faithful to her and tortured by her through many years, the autobiography ends. Thereafter the story is simply a graphic portrayal of how revenge is useless, being circumvented by time in the interests of a universal justice not unbenevolent. As Heathcliff himself insists, he never harmed anyone—they all brought their doom upon themselves, Cathy by choosing the world against her heart, and Hindley, Edgar, and Isabella by certain defects in their own

characters. But he hated, and that was evil, and evil could not triumph; it was self-doomed and self-destroyed. Linton Heathcliff was the offspring of hate and so was essentially weak. But the love of the second Catherine and of Hareton, Heathcliff's prototype (son of Heathcliff's enemy, and yet, by reason of love, more Heathcliff's son than his own), was vicarious redemption, not only for Heathcliff but for the Catherine who lay in her grave. Emily wanted redemption; she had to have it, for, as her poems indicate, she was haunted by a conviction of sin; so she procured it after a fashion by depicting it; procured, by a tremendous enlargement of her understanding, forgiveness of sin.

Thus this passionate, original and sardonic novel—"a fiend of a book . . . the action of which," Dante Gabriel Rossetti said, "is laid in hell, only it seems places and things have English names there"<sup>1</sup>—is tender in its final implication; and flawlessly moral. This much at least Emily had taken from her father's religion: a belief in the necessity of dreadful expiation. In this sense Charlotte was right in saying every page was "surcharged with a sort of moral electricity."<sup>2</sup> Heathcliff could die only after years of slow, retributive, just sufferings: but he died in ecstasy, "slain by too much hope and an unnatural joy"—his death the only possible end. As Emily wrote those words, she felt that her death was the only possible end.

Is it strange, then, that she was all but impervious to praise or blame? Whether they knew it or not, her readers held in their hands not art (except insofar as æsthetics and ethics are inextricable) but her life. She had scrutinized that life, and in the fire of her moral zeal, as sternly as if disinterested, passed sentence—and so attained, at once, nobility of style and of content. It is "pure and purifying tragedy."<sup>3</sup> The very weather had assumed a meaning beyond what is known as weather: "All that remained of the day was a beamless amber light along the west: but I could see every pebble on the path, and every blade of grass, by that splendid moon." Emily was not arrogant; but she had seen; and what could critics tell her?

Her first critics were Charlotte and Anne, themselves developing novelists. It has been said that the three young women discussed divisions of chapters, the naming of characters, and the progress of events, each lending a hand

<sup>1</sup> In a letter to William Allingham, 1854.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, III, 165.

<sup>3</sup> Nicoll, *Introduction*, XLV.



to the other's work.<sup>1</sup> One will be forgiven for piously disbelieving. With her sisters Emily held the parlour like a fort after Papa had gone upstairs; and in concert with them filled with black characters demy-paper fastened to card-board (the Haworth stationer wondered how in the world the Misses Brontë could use up so much paper); and rose, and paced arm in arm, round and round the room—a habit begun at Miss Wooler's—talking in hushed voices of the problems of fiction. But in all deep matters Emily was a lone adventurer, and could not have asked for aid where she felt no need of aid. With her plot imposed from within, not arbitrary, she wrote intuitively, with an easy strength. Her fine effects were largely fortuitous. She utilized her narrow experience to give a sense of verisimilitude. Was her model for the dwelling of Wuthering Heights, for instance, one of the ancient warped farmhouses, guarded by a few Scotch firs, on Haworth moor; or High Sunderland Hall near Law Hill, the gateway of which does so perfectly illustrate Emily's "quantity of grotesque carving"? If Gimmerton Kirk as well as the house of Wuthering Heights can be identified with the Law Hill scene (and there are excellent reasons for supposing Gimmerton Kirk to be Gimmerton Sough, another name for St.-Anne's-in-the Brears), it is interesting to recall that a Mrs. Earnshaw was in Emily's time a servant at the Academy. What more natural than that the allegory should be laid where Emily suffered the original experience? But its locale does not greatly matter. Our attention should be concentrated where Emily's and Heathcliff's was, on the invisible which is yet seen, on the inaudible which is heard, on the intangible which is touched, on the fluid which is fixed, on the infinite which has a local habitation and a name, the eternal which consents to the hard restrictions of time. Charlotte in *The Professor* and Anne in *Agnes Grey* were attempting something quite different, with heroic things and ultimates sensibly left out.

Then what of the hypothesis that Branwell was the real author of *Wuthering Heights*? It is true that a *prima facie* case can be made out in favour of Branwell. On September 10, 1846, he did write Leyland that he was devoting hours snatched from illness "to the composition of a three-volume *Novel*—one volume of which is completed, and along with the two forthcoming ones, has been the result of half a dozen by-past years of thoughts about, and experiences in,

<sup>1</sup> Robinson, 210.

this crooked path of Life. . . . My novel . . . gives a vivid picture of human feeling for good and evil—veiled by the cloak of deceit which must enwrap man and woman. . . .” Furthermore, Branwell’s friends, George Searle Phillips, William Dearden, Edward Sloane and Francis Grundy have variously testified that they either heard, or heard of, the manuscript through Branwell. Wrote Mr. Grundy, who claimed to have seen a part of *Wuthering Heights* fished out of Branwell’s hat: “Patrick Bronte declared to me, and what his sister said bore out the assertion, that he wrote a great part of *Wuthering Heights* himself. . . . The weird fancies of diseased genius with which he used to entertain me in our long talks at Luddenden Foot reappear in the pages of the novel, and I am inclined to believe that the very plot was his invention rather than his sister’s.”<sup>1</sup>

But this *prima facie* case crumbles at the touch of a feather. Leaving out the fact that both Charlotte and the servant Martha Brown saw Emily writing the book, Branwell was a braggart, as proved by his letters to *Blackwood’s*, Wordsworth and others; and, as he degenerated under the influence of alcohol and opium, did not scruple—as proved by Charlotte’s account of how he “screwed” shillings from his father—to add lying to his repertoire.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, “novel” may have referred to quite another piece of writing, now lost. Certainly his description can only by distortion be applied to *Wuthering Heights*. Where, in that work, is the veiling “cloak of deceit which must enwrap man and woman”? As for Branwell’s friends, zealous memories are singularly flexible and accommodating. Grundy, the boldest, has proved himself unreliable by describing all three sisters as “large of nose, small of figure, red of hair, prominent of spectacle.” The nose, figure and spectacles applied only to Charlotte; the red hair to none of them—it was Branwell’s, solely.<sup>3</sup>

But no refutation of this absurd theory is really required beyond internal evidence. To anyone sensitive to the *timbre* of a piece of writing, nuances and style, the person who wrote the grandiose poetry and pretentious prose of his last period could never have written the noble *Wuthering Heights*. For one thing, the bare and sexless purity of *Wuthering Heights* would have been quite impossible to Branwell of the debauched senses. Conversely, the person

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 55, 60, 61.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 83, 84.      <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 262.

who wrote Emily's poetry obviously, by innumerable clues and parallels, wrote *Wuthering Heights*.

Branwell was alive when *Wuthering Heights* was published, yet did not lift his voice. Would he have remained silent if the novel had been his own? Would it not have been in character for him to proclaim to the world (from which he did not shrink like Emily, but rather adored) that he, he, *he*—Patrick Branwell Brontë, originally known as Young Soult the Rhymer, and John Flower, and Northangerland—was the author of a manuscript that actually got printed and bound between two covers and sold to the people of London and all England? Alas for him that Ellis did not begin with a B.

And would Emily, who cared so little for the world's attention, have secured it by so mean a fraud?<sup>1</sup> In the light of her moral scrupulosity the idea is preposterous.

And how, to mention a final absurdity, could Branwell during his moral and physical prostration, in 1846, have written a novel which required the energy of a titan? After all, imagination is a force, which, in *Wuthering Heights*, is comparable to a force of nature. Nothing requires so much sheer energy as the creative act.

<sup>1</sup> It has been suggested by Miss Alice Law that Emily was party to the deception in order to help the self-respect of Branwell, whom Charlotte, being "out" with him, would not admit into her publishing plan; but the theory will not hold water. (Law, *in toto*.)

## XXIX

### WAITING

HAVING, in the guise of Heathcliff, killed herself off in *Wuthering Heights*, Emily's continued breathing was something of an anomaly. For years she had brooded on death. Now in a sense it lay behind her: she was a Lazarus half longing to return to the shadow.

But when death insisted, life insisted—it was curious. What would be the fate of her novel, which with Anne's *Agnes Grey* had been accepted (on condition that they part finance it) by Thomas Cautley Newby of 95 Mortimer Street, London?<sup>1</sup> In August 1846 she handled the first proof-sheets. How strange to see the personal words immured in cold print! What would people say? It did not greatly matter—but would they reject her?

There was no way to find out but to wait.

Yet was it only for the judgment of the world that she waited? No, this suspension, this hiatus, had a deeper significance, felt, though not declared. She was waiting, as the doomed wait, for the unknown event which, in the midst of everything wrong, would suddenly make everything right. Those who wait, like those who listen, have nerves strained to the edge. Their eyes interrogate darkness even at high noon.

It was high noon in the little world of Haworth in the sense that more things than usual were going on, excellent things and lamentable things, in odd medley.

Papa's eyes were now so blind he could distinguish figures only when they stood relieved by bright light; and he had to be helped into his surplice and led on to the pulpit, Sundays, like the great Samson "eyeless in Gaza, in the mill with slaves."

O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,  
Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse  
Without all hope of day.

He had but few remaining comforts: his clay pipe, his spittoon, the smooth pistol in his pocket, the gun he knew was hanging on the wall,<sup>2</sup> and his brown-leather eight-sided snuff-box.<sup>3</sup> Of little use to him now were his silver fruit knife<sup>3</sup> for peeling with his own hands, or his spectacles in

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 145.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 90, 91.

<sup>3</sup> Museum.

the shagreen case,<sup>1</sup> or his heel spikes,<sup>1</sup> or stout oak walking-stick.<sup>1</sup> That in old age he had learned the patience he lacked in youth only made his affliction more pitiful. At the beginning of August Charlotte and Emily went on a scouting trip to Manchester and interviewed a famous oculist, Dr. Wilson. He said it would be necessary to examine the eyes. So late in August Charlotte convoyed Papa to lodgings on Boundary Street. Yes, said Dr. Wilson, the cataract was ripe, he would operate. Charlotte wrote Emily that for at least a month she must take charge of the Parsonage and—what was more difficult—Branwell; and, a little later, that she had watched the delicate operation and marvelled at Papa's fortitude. At his sickest his only wail had been, "I shall never feel Keeper's paws on my knees again!"<sup>2</sup> and perhaps now, as at other times when low in spirits, begged Charlotte to describe over and over each weapon in Prince Albert's armoury.<sup>3</sup> When he was safely in a darkened room, Charlotte, with a remarkable courage of her own, commenced a new novel, *Jane Eyre*—*The Professor* having been that day rejected by another publisher. Anne too had started another novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, modelled on Branwell's deterioration.

Charlotte wrote *Jane Eyre* with more feeling and freedom than she had written *The Professor*. *Wuthering Heights* has never been and can never be imitated, for it is organic and unique; nevertheless the fact that Charlotte read it between her two novels is not negligible in understanding the excellence of the second.

Emily alone was "idle"; was waiting. On September 14 she wrote a poem, the recastings of which took her up until May 13, 1847.<sup>4</sup> The changes she made were, on the whole, good, showing that her second thoughts were sometimes better than her first: as witness:

It was the autumn of the year;  
The time to labouring peasants dear . . .

changed to

It was the autumn of the year;  
When grain grows yellow in the ear . . .

The poem with its social consciousness—a new note—begins harshly, but not without effectiveness:

<sup>1</sup> Museum.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, IV, 91.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 92.

<sup>4</sup> A. C. Benson gave the date, erroneously, as May 13, 1843, and is quoted by the *Shakespeare Head Brontë*.

Why ask to know what date, what clime?  
 There dwelt our own humanity,  
 Power-worshippers from earliest time,  
 Feet-kissers of triumphant crime . . .  
 Crushing down Justice, honouring wrong,  
 If that be feeble, this be strong. . . .

And continues with this personal description and prophecy:

Strange proofs I've seen, how tears could hide  
 Their secret with a life-long pride,  
 And then reveal it as they died.  
 Strange courage, and strange weakness too,  
 In that last hour when most are true . . .  
 Now all today and all last night  
 I've had one scene before my sight:—

Wood-shadowed dales a harvest moon  
 Unclouded in its glorious noon;  
 A solemn landscape, wide and still,  
 A red fire on a distant hill,  
 A line of fire, and deep below,  
 Another dusker, dreamier glow . . .

Branwell was writing a long poem, "Morley Hall."<sup>1</sup> Did he show it to Emily? He may well have done so, sensing that she had long since ceased to feel anything for him but sympathy and love. He was not over-weening Hindley to her any more, but Hindley's loving (though undemonstrative) son Hareton.

Papa came home wonderfully improved, being actually able to read a book again.<sup>2</sup> When he approached the pulpit unassisted the congregation was amazed.

But Charlotte, with this to rejoice and *Jane Eyre* to occupy her, was gloomier than ever. No, she said pathetically, she could not start a school with Ellen Nussey. "I know life is passing away and that I am doing nothing . . . but whenever I consult my Conscience it affirms that I am doing right in staying home—and bitter are its upbraidings when I yield to an eager desire for release—I returned to Brussels after Aunt's death against my conscience—prompted by what then seemed an irresistible impulse—I was punished for my selfish folly by a total withdrawal for more than two years of happiness and peace of mind. . . ."<sup>3</sup> It was now time for another of her bi-annual letters to Monsieur Héger. The one of a year ago had been an emotional outburst, probably because she had "denied herself absolutely the

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 113.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 116.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 115.

pleasure of speaking about him—even to Emily.” She went on sadly: “But I have been able to conquer neither my regrets nor my impatience. That, indeed, is humiliating—to be unable to control one’s thoughts, to be the slave of a regret, of a memory, the slave of a fixed and dominant idea which lords it over the mind. Why cannot I have just as much friendship for you, as you for me—neither more nor less? . . . To write to an old pupil cannot be a very interesting occupation for you, I know; but for me it is life. . . . To forbid me to write to you, to refuse to answer me, would be to tear from me my only joy on earth. . . .”<sup>1</sup> Perhaps by this November 1846 Monsieur Hégér, at the instigation of his wife if not of boredom, had so forbidden and so refused. Charlotte is supposed to have told Laetitia Wheelwright at a later period that Monsieur Hégér asked her to use the Royal Athénée address because his wife disapproved, and that of course she broke off the correspondence at once.<sup>2</sup> It is possible. No more letters to or from him are extant; and poor Charlotte was dour enough for anything to have happened.

Was there nothing to comfort the household this winter, when the “cold was dreadful” and the “sky looked like ice” and the “earth was frozen” and the “wind sharp as a two-edged blade,” and they could not keep warm and Anne had asthma and all of them severe colds and coughs? Nothing—except a poor shivering literary hope. And even that must have been forgotten the day a sheriff’s officer knocked on the door and invited Branwell either to pay his debts or go to York Gaol.<sup>3</sup>

Yet in spite of Charlotte’s scorn Branwell was still not utterly devoid of good. Some of his words to Leyland at this time are quite decent.<sup>4</sup> He had sent a letter to Thorp Green and recalled it. Then one *not* recalled was returned unopened by Dr. Evans, Mrs. Robinson’s physician, with a warning that “concealed hopes about one lady should be given up, cost what it might.” Branwell wrote Leyland: “God only knows what it does cost, and will, hereafter. . . . I have in truth been too much petted through life. . . . I shall never be able to realize the too sanguine hopes of my friends, for at 28 I am a thoroughly *old man*—mentally and bodily”—and quoted Byron’s

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 70.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 289.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 118.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed at no time did he merit Sir W. Robertson Nicoll’s harsh description of him as that “repellant figure of a miserable brother” of whose sisters’ “gifts he had not a particle.” (Nicoll, *Introduction*, XLI.)

No more, no more, oh! never more on me  
 The freshness of the heart shall fall like dew,  
 Which, out of all the lovely things we see,  
 Extracts emotions beautiful and new.

"I used to think," he said ironically, "that if I could have for a week the free range of the British Museum—the Library included—I could feel as though I were placed for seven days in Paradise, but now, really, dear sir, my eyes would roam over the Elgin marbles, the Egyptian salon and the most treasured volumes like the eyes of a dead codfish. . . . I only know that it is time for me to be something when I am nothing." Mrs. Robinson repulsed him in every way except financially;<sup>1</sup> but he continued to believe she adored him and was cut off from him through no fault of her own—and continued to drink, eat lumps of opium sent off for or wangled from the village druggist, contract fresh debts, suffer dizzy spells and palpitations of the heart, make ribald self-derivative drawings, and—pitiful incongruity—write poetry. Of Leyland he inquired anxiously if a certain "fragment" when finished "would be worth sending to some respectable periodical like *Blackwood's Magazine*."<sup>2</sup> (How touching that recurrent *Blackwood's* dream!)

The spring was a little easier. Charlotte's toothache got better. The Robinson girls began to write Anne again (a circumstance sedulously kept from Branwell). Ellen's now mildly lunatic brother George "if he did not improve neither did he retrograde." Ellen sent Charlotte some pretty little cuffs. And Charlotte salved her conscience for betraying Branwell's secrets with: "We should not unnecessarily expose relations . . . but neither should we degrade ourselves and them by inventing false excuses." Mrs. C. turned up again, staying for tea and regaling them with an account of the heavy years since she parted from that horrible Mr. C. and set up a boarding house. Ellen sent some "extremely pretty and light" wrist frills, and Charlotte countered with a "scrubby yard of lace." Then Ellen, invited for a visit, was assured that Branwell, though "weaker in mind, and the complete rake in appearance," would not be uncivil, but, on the contrary "smooth as oil"; and, further, that she and Emily and Anne would meet their visitor in Keighley, where they could "take tea

<sup>1</sup> She sent £20 at a time. *Life and Letters*, IV, 217.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 120, 123, 124, 137.



together jovially at the Devonshire Arms, and walk home"—it was May—"in the cool of the evening."<sup>1</sup>

Alas, Ellen was unable to come.<sup>2</sup>

In June the sisters sent copies of their poems to Wordsworth, Tennyson, Lockhart and DeQuincey. Charlotte, as spokesman, tried to be jocular: "Sir," she wrote each, "my relatives, Ellis and Acton Bell, and myself, heedless of the repeated warnings of various respectable publishers, have committed the rash act of printing a volume of poems. The consequences predicted have of course overtaken us: our book is found to be a drug; no man needs it or heeds it. In the space of a year our publisher has disposed but of two copies, and by what painful efforts he succeeded in getting rid of these two, himself only knows. Before transferring the edition to the trunkmakers," etc. But one suspects that the situation struck them, in their deep hearts, as something other than comical.<sup>3</sup>

By August a whole year had elapsed since Emily and Anne had corrected the first proof-sheets of their novels, and still Mr. Newby procrastinated. As for Charlotte's first novel, it was still travelling from one apathetic publisher to another. Then suddenly Messrs. Smith and Elder included with their rejection of *The Professor* two pages of constructive criticism and an invitation to send her second novel for consideration. *Jane Eyre* was almost immediately dispatched and accepted, and, with a speed dazzling to Emily and Anne, published the following month. Charlotte corrected proofs at Brookroyd right under Ellen's nose, but vouchsafed no information, and was asked for none—which seems superhuman.<sup>4</sup>

From Brookroyd Charlotte brought back a trunkful of presents from Ellen: a screen for Papa, a jar "heavy and replete" with something for Anne, a cap for Tabby (who said, "she never thought o' naught o' t' sort as Miss Nussey sending her aught, and she was sure, she could never thank her enough for it"), and a collar and apples for Emily. She smiled on receiving them, "with an expression at once well pleased and slightly surprised;" and sat down on the floor of the bedroom to count and turn over the apples—wondering with a poet's mind at their round shape, the whiteness of their flesh, and the redness of their skin.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 125, 127-133.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 134.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 135, 136.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 140-142, 228; Biographical Notice.

<sup>5</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 143.

It was October again, and Charlotte had received six courtesy-copies of *Jane Eyre*; and then her old enemy the east wind, as if begrudging her this triumph, began to blow and blow across the moors. Charlotte complained, but Emily said the east wind was very uninteresting; it did not affect her nervous system in the slightest. When it stopped Anne wrote Ellen that the crab-cheese was excellent, added some random news, and closed with "the Major's compliments." Sweet proper Anne: she sat stooped over a desk most of the time: scarcely ever took a walk these days, or allowed herself to be drawn into conversation.<sup>1</sup>

About this time Charlotte began a literary correspondence with W. S. Williams, reader for Smith, Elder and Co., which expanded as *Jane Eyre* rapidly became the most popular book in England. Being by temperament sociable if not slightly garrulous, she now talked earnestly and long about Thackeray (who was "exceedingly moved and pleased by *Jane Eyre*"), and the reviews (for the most part laudatory), and Jane Austen, and George Sand, and the shuffling Mr. Newby (imagine! he had only recently, after a year's delay, sent Emily and Anne their final proof-sheets!);<sup>2</sup> till she and Mr. Williams were old friends.

Still, all in all, Ellen was the more satisfactory confidante. Into her ear Charlotte could pour the news that many parishioners were expressing a desire that the curate Mr. Nicholls, on leave, should not trouble to recross the Irish Channel but remain quietly where he was—a wrong feeling of flock toward shepherd, and not such as poor Mr. Weightman excited; to Ellen could, or did, declare that Branwell was more than ordinarily annoying, leading Papa a wretched life; and then, returning to Mr. Nicholls and protesting perhaps a shade overmuch: "I cannot for the life of me see those interesting germs of goodness in him you discovered; his narrowness of mind always strikes me chiefly." And to Ellen—only Ellen—could she of the somewhat protruding lower lip and jaw confide: "What you say about the effect of ether on Catherine Swaine rather startled me—I had always consoled myself with the idea of having my front teeth extracted and rearranged some day under its soothing influence—but now I should think twice before I consented to inhale; one would not

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 144–146.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 145–174, *et seq.*

like to make a fool of oneself." Yes, Mr. Williams as a confidant had his limitations.<sup>1</sup>

Then at last, in December, Anne and Emily received their six complimentary copies of *Agnes Grey* and *Wuthering Heights*, in three volumes, bound in brown cloth.<sup>2</sup> Alas, the text was crammed with typographical errors, Mr. Newby having in most cases simply ignored the authors' corrections in the proof-sheets. In her own special copy Emily re-corrected some of these misprints. Charlotte, author of *Jane Eyre*, patronized just a little, writing Mr. Williams: "You are not far wrong in your judgment respecting *Wuthering Heights*. . . . Ellis has a strong, original mind, full of strange though sombre power. When he writes poetry that power speaks in language at once condensed, elaborated, and refined, but in prose it breaks forth in scenes which shock more than they attract. Ellis will improve, however, because he knows his defects."<sup>3</sup>

But if Charlotte criticized, she was criticized in turn. In the midst of huzzahs an occasional voice called *Jane Eyre* "godless" and "pernicious" and "coarse." Even J. G. Lockhart, after judging it "worth fifty Trollopes and Martineaus rolled into one counterpane, with fifty Dickenses and Bulwers to keep them company," frowned and added, "but rather a brazen miss."<sup>4</sup>

The reviews of *Wuthering Heights* and its rider, *Agnes Grey*, were slow coming in.

Meanwhile all three sisters had influenza twice over within a few weeks, Anne worst of all; and Papa a touch; and Branwell fainting fits, first at the Talbot and then the Commercial Inn, Halifax. He was constantly dunned for debts. A pen-and-ink self-portrait of about this time (an excellent likeness, Leyland said) shows him with a neck-halter ready to be drawn up tight. Another sketch inscribed "The rescue of the punch-bowl" is a drunken scene at the Talbot, showing five men in different stages of Dionysian conviviality. And Charlotte cried to Ellen twenty miles away at Brookroyd: "Branwell has contrived by some means to get more money from the old quarter—and has led us a sad life with his absurd and often intolerable conduct—Papa is harassed day and night—we have little

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 147, 148, 157, 158.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 156. Mr. Newby undertook to print 350 copies in the first edition, but later declared he had printed only 250.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 162, 165.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 168, 169.

peace—he is always sick, has two or three times fallen down in fits—what will be the ultimate end God knows——”<sup>1</sup>

What would be the ultimate end? . . .

Coveting the tremendous success of *Jane Eyre* and aided in his artifice by the misapprehension of several periodicals, Mr. Newby framed his advertisements to imply that the real author of *Jane Eyre* was his own Ellis Bell; which disturbed Charlotte no end. Mr. Newby, she told her friend Mr. Williams indignantly, should disdain “what Ellis himself of all things disdains—recourse to trickery.” *Jane Eyre* had gone into a second edition. But soon *Wuthering Heights* began to sell too; and consequently, wrote Charlotte to Mr. Williams, “Mr. Newby is getting into marvellously good tune with his authors.”<sup>2</sup>

All this time Anne had been working on *The Tenant of Wildfel Hall*. Was Emily too working on a second novel? It is possible that after a long lapse of time she had started one. Certainly there exists a letter from Mr. Newby, without superscription, which was probably addressed to Ellis rather than Acton, inasmuch as there was found in Emily’s desk an envelope addressed in the same hand: to “Ellis Bell Esq.” The letter, though not in the envelope, was folded to fit it perfectly; and reads, with cheerful neglect of grammar:

“Dear Sir,—I am much obliged by your kind note and shall have great pleasure in making arrangements for your next novel. I would not hurry its completion for I think you are quite right not to let it go before the world until well satisfied with it, for much depends on your next work if it be an improvement on your first you will have established yourself as a first-rate novelist, but if it fall short the critics will be too apt to say that you have expended your talent on your first novel. I shall therefore have pleasure in accepting it upon the understanding that its completion be at your own time.

Believe me, my dear Sir,

yrs sincerely,

Feb. 15th, 1848.

T. C. Newby.”

And yet . . . and yet. . . . Emily had been so thorough in *Wuthering Heights* she was purged. She had said everything about the theme which racked her. What more was there to say? If she started a second book, its theme must have been less violent and quite different—perhaps essays. No

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 175–178, 202.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 181, 187.

fragment or reference remains. It is therefore easier to believe that she shared Charlotte's attitude, "As to my next book, I suppose it will grow to maturity in time, as grass grows or corn ripens, but I cannot force it"—and that her second book of prose never pierced aboveground.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Williams invited the three "brothers" to London to "see the great world," but Currer declined for the present "such a treat," saying: "Ellis, I imagine, would soon turn aside from the spectacle in disgust. I do not think he admits it as his creed that 'the proper study of mankind is man'—at least not the artificial man of cities. In some points I consider Ellis somewhat of a theorist; now and then he broaches ideas which strike my sense as much more daring and original than practical; his reason may be in advance of mine"—she did not really think it was—"but certainly it often travels a different road. I should say Ellis will not be seen in his full strength till he is seen as an essayist."<sup>2</sup>

As an essayist—what made Charlotte say that? Emily's brilliant essays at the Brussels *Pensionnat*? Her comments on Hazlitt's and Lamb's essays, now at the Parsonage? Or simply the quality of her discourse? What daring and original ideas did she broach? Were they on literature, religion, philosophy, or human relations—love? Certainly the ideas she did not broach but hoarded in the privacy of her brain, while she baked the fine light bread, and waited through heavy night-hours for Branwell's drunken return, dared more, in strength of spiritual nonconformity.

Mr. George Smith of Smith, Elder and Company offered to publish the future prose of Ellis and Acton Bell (having no doubt made an astute estimate of *Wuthering Heights*), for "C. Bell" replied:

"Dear Sir,— . . . Your conduct to me has been such that you cannot doubt my relatives would have been most happy, had it been in their power to avail themselves of your proposal respecting the publication of their future works, but their present engagements to Mr. Newby are such as to prevent their consulting freely their own inclinations and interests, and I need not tell you, who have so clearly proved the weight honour has with you as a principle of action, that engagements must be respected whether they are irksome or not. For my part I peculiarly regret this circumstance; it would have been. . . ."

But the rest of the letter has been lost. "It would have

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 187-189.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 89.

been" one of the few pieces of good fortune in the life of Emily Brontë.<sup>1</sup>

As it was, she had few reasons to thank providence the spring of 1848. But she did have a chance at the French papers before passing them on to Ellen;<sup>2</sup> and could borrow books from the circulating library in Keighley; and read those Mr. Williams sent Charlotte. The winter having been unusually severe the timid first-green on the hills appeared more than ever beautiful. For she could now say with Charlotte: "Youth is gone—gone—and will never come back;" though with Charlotte could never have added: "Can't help it."<sup>3</sup> There were certain changes and losses too deep for a wistful jest.

Having seen proof corrected, Ellen had for a long time entertained suspicions; indeed once while walking with the three sisters on the moor had tried to plague them. Suddenly, by the rare illusion of light known as parheliion, caused by ice-crystals in the air, three suns shone in the sky. "Look!" cried Charlotte. "That is you," said Ellen, "*you* are the three suns." "Hush!" said Charlotte indignantly. But Emily, standing apart and a little higher on a heathery knoll, smiled without anger.<sup>4</sup>

So this April 1848 Ellen resolved on a show-down and informed Charlotte of the rumour that she was an authoress; and paused, as if to say "—Well?" Charlotte answered in dudgeon: "I have given *no one* either a right to affirm, or hint, in the most distant manner, that I am 'publishing'—(humbug). . . . I scout the idea utterly. Whoever, after I have distinctly rejected the charge, urges it upon me, will do an unkind and an ill-bred thing. . . ." This seems a shade less conscientious than Anne's "We have done nothing (to speak of) since you were here"—written the previous January when at least two and perhaps three of the sisters were engaged in writing second novels. But perhaps they squared it with their consciences by drawing a complete dichotomy: it was Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell who published, three eccentric brothers; not Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë, in long gathered skirts and shawls. Besides, they had pledged each other to keep the secret.<sup>5</sup>

Even Papa had not been informed till after the success of *Jane Eyre* was assured, early this year. Urged by her sisters Charlotte had accosted him in his study one after-

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 190, 290.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 36.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 205.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 228; Robinson, 190, 191.    <sup>5</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 175, 211.

noon after lunch, with a copy of the book and several sample reviews of the good kind and bad.

"Papa, I've been writing a book."

"Have you, my dear?"

"Yes; and I want you to read it."

"I am afraid it will try my eyes too much."

"But it is not in manuscript; it is printed."

"My dear! you've never thought of the expense it will be! It will be almost sure to be a loss; for how can you get a book sold? No one knows you or your name."

"But, Papa, I don't think it will be a loss; no more will you, if you will just let me read you a review or two, and tell you more about it."

After he had listened to the reviews and, with the help of silver spectacles, dipped into the novel, the old and voluminously-cravated stalked in to tea.

"Girls," he said, "do you know Charlotte has been writing a book, and it is much better than likely?"<sup>1</sup>

But Emily and Anne did not make this a general confessional by showing him *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, deterred, perhaps, by knowledge that Papa would disapprove of advancing Mr. Newby £50.<sup>2</sup> Nor is it probable that they now explained the delightful ruse of the three Bells of dubious gender.

Not that this matter of pseudonyms was free of drawbacks.

Early in July Messrs. Smith, Elder and Co. wrote the Messrs. Bell that Mr. Newby had reported Acton's new book *The Tenant of Wildfel Hall* to an American publisher as a new work by Currer Bell, who, to "the best of his belief," comprehended Ellis and Acton too. The Messrs. Bell were furious. "This has gone too far," said Charlotte—or words to the same effect. "We must prove to Messrs. Smith, Elder and Company that we are not one fraud, but three authors." So, Emily refusing to show herself, Charlotte and Anne decided to undertake the mission; and packed a small box, and set off that very Saturday evening; but got caught in a storm, and had to sit in damp clothes from Keighley to Leeds, and on the night train from Leeds to London. Arriving at dawn they hurried to the old Chapter Coffee House in Paternoster Row, freshened up the best they could, drank a cup of coffee, and started out

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, III, 144; Gaskell, 338, 339.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, III, 144, 160.

to walk, sleepy and confused, to 65 Cornhill. On being shown in to Mr. Smith, Charlotte put his own letter into his hand. "Where did you get this?" asked tall young Mr. Smith, staring at two small ladies dressed in black. They explained. But . . . was it possible? Nonplussed, he presented them to stooped, faded, middle-aged, kind Mr. Williams; who joined in the anathematizing and excommunication of Mr. Newby. That evening Charlotte had just taken a strong dose of sal volatile for a "thundering headache" when Mr. Smith, in full evening clothes, with two elegantly-gowned sisters, was announced; and carried the authoresses off, a little doubtful about their dull clothes, to mount a crimson-carpeted staircase in a brilliant throng and hear Rossini's *Barber of Seville*. Charlotte, with her "headache in her pocket," was pleasantly excited; Anne, in London for the first time, as always calm and gentle. So passed two memorable days. They dined at the homes of Mr. Smith and Mr. Williams, and went sight-seeing; and Tuesday morning, loaded with books and wretchedly jaded, departed for Haworth—and rest.<sup>1</sup>

One imagines the scene in which the two worn travellers reported to Emily. And you admitted I was a woman too? Emily asked; and doubtless leaned forward, face white, burning eyes fixed. Yes. Emily's wrath may be deduced from the following epistle which in trepidation Charlotte sent off to Mr. Williams: "Permit me to caution you not to speak of my sisters when you write to me. I mean, do not use the word in the plural. Ellis Bell will not endure to be alluded to under any other appellation than the *nom de plume*. I committed a grand error in betraying his identity to you and Mr. Smith. It was inadvertent—the words 'we are three sisters' escaped me before I was aware. I regretted the avowal the moment I had made it; I regret it bitterly now, for I find it is against every feeling and intention of Ellis Bell." "I find" was not strictly true; she needed no revelation: she had long been fully aware of Emily's uncompromising attitude. But what possessed Emily so strongly that she must needs humiliate her sister? Is her fierce reluctance to be anything but a man another argument for the hypothesis of peculiarity? Charlotte wrote further, to Mr. Williams: "I smile at you for the earnestness with which you urge on us the propriety of seeing something of London society. There would be an advantage in it—a

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 229, 230, 250–254.



great advantage; yet it is one that no power on earth could induce Ellis Bell, for instance, to avail himself of. . . . An existence of absolute seclusion and unvarying monotony, such as we have long—I may say, indeed, ever—been habituated to, tends, I fear, to unfit the mind for lively and exciting scenes, to destroy the capacity for social enjoyment.”<sup>1</sup>

No wonder the excitements of this summer prevented Emily and Anne from writing their four-yearly Diary this July 30, 1848—a year earlier than usual, as planned.

In August Charlotte’s interesting correspondence with Mr. Williams swung to matters more purely literary. “The Bells,” she wrote, “are very sincere in their worship of Truth, and they hope to apply themselves to a consideration of Art, so as to attain one day the power of speaking the language of conviction in the accents of persuasion; though they rather apprehend that whatever pains they take to modify and soften, an abrupt word or vehement tone will now and then occur to startle ears polite, whenever the subject shall chance to be such as moves their spirits within them.” Then, after discussing Mr. Huntington in Anne’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* and Mr. Rochester in her own *Jane Eyre*, she wrote, with some truth, but that merely superficial: “Heathcliff again, of *Wuthering Heights*, is quite another creation. He exemplifies the effects which a life of continued injustice and hard usage may produce on a naturally perverse, vindictive, and inexorable disposition. Carefully trained and kindly treated, the black gipsy-cub might possibly have been reared into a human being, but tyranny and ignorance made of him a mere demon. The worst of it is”—*worst?*—“some of his spirit seems breathed through the whole narrative in which he figures: it haunts every moor and glen, and beckons in every fir-tree of the Heights.” Charlotte did not have an inkling that her great talent compared to Emily’s genius was as candlelight to the burning of the sun.<sup>2</sup>

The weather this August was peculiar and unseasonable. Rain drizzled and dripped and poured in sheets; and the Parsonage wondered if summer would ever return.<sup>3</sup>

The sisters read the fine selection of books sent as gifts from 65 Cornhill; and were delighted when Mr. Smith offered to take over their poetry from Aylott and Jones. Charlotte

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 241, 242.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 243–245.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 246.

in a letter to Mr. Williams showed herself, on September 18, more generous and discriminating in her evaluation of Emily's poetry than prose: "Ellis Bell's is a different stamp"—from her own. "Of its startling excellence I am deeply convinced. . . . The pieces are short, but they are very genuine; they stirred my heart like the sound of a trumpet when I read them alone and in secret. . . . I was sternly rated at first for having taken an unwarrantable liberty. This I expected, for Ellis Bell is of no flexible or ordinary materials. But by dint of entreaty and reason I at last wrung out a reluctant consent to have the 'rhymes,' as they were contemptuously termed, published. The author never alludes to them; or, when she does, it is with scorn. But I know no woman that ever lived ever wrote such poetry before. Condensed energy, clearness, finish—strange, strong pathos are the r characteristics. . . . This is my deliberate and quite impartial decision"<sup>1</sup>—and one marvellously to her credit.

If only she had apologized less about Heathcliff of *Wuthering Heights*. "Whether it is right or advisable to create beings like Heathcliff I do not know: I scarcely think it is." And about Cathy; though she did concede to that heroine honesty "in the midst of perverted passion and passionate perversity."<sup>2</sup> It is strange. One would have thought she had enough wildness behind her conventionality to have understood.

But still thunderclouds blew up from behind the moors, and silver rods struck down; still wet dripped from sunken tombstones on two sides of the Parsonage, shabby besieging army. Even when the rain ceased, no promise was vouchsafed that the sky would clear. "My sisters," Charlotte reported August 28, "are pretty well," but she meant "appear pretty well."<sup>3</sup> Emily, now less than ever, permitted what she felt to be seen.

She and the weather when expectant calm lay on the earth had the same quality. A roving chill pierced through from—where? Not a leaf moved, not so much as a twig broke. Would the large flat drops fall again, as before; or was this suspense preparation for an event of another order, more strange? Eyes were searching and ears listening. Lungs were full, but the breath not yet exhaled.

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 254–256.

<sup>2</sup> Preface to 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights*.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 250.

## XXX

### BRANWELL'S TIME

It happened as suddenly as lightning forks. There had been reason to anticipate it, yet it had not been anticipated. Suddenly it was. Suddenly Branwell lay on a bed upstairs, sculptural, cold and detached, and they knew that he would not again wake to torment them.

Emily having stood by him for years, it is presumed that her hands helped prepare and arrange him for the grave. How natural if in looking at the familiar and yet suddenly unfamiliar form she saw, instead, the favoured young man of whom, once, she had been secretly jealous; saw a little boy with red hair curling under a peaked cap, who plunged ahead of five little girls on the moors. As is the way at such times, she was terribly sorry for everything she had thought or done against him, from the beginning. But she had been sorry a long time; and days, months—three years—of devotion had almost wiped out that score. She did not consider that it was wiped out, for she was stern and merciless with herself, but something in her was a little more at peace than it would otherwise have been.

Did Emily slip out of the room in which Branwell lay dead, that 24th day of September, and go off by herself to rest? If so, she was but little rested, for none who have just looked upon their dead can stave off the past that rushes in upon them; nor avoid the solitary, inert affliction which is deeper and bitterer than the first sharp pangs.

This summer Branwell had found out that Mrs. Robinson (according to Charlotte, "one calculated to bring a curse wherever she goes by the mixture of weakness, perversion, and deceit in her nature"<sup>1</sup>) was deeply infatuated with Sir Edward Scott, a recent widower, and meant to marry him the instant she got her two daughters married off to someone—anyone. Thereafter he had drunk more liquor and eaten more opium, but gained thereby less and less oblivion. Failing in the arts had been bad, the disgrace of Luddenden Foot, bad—but all such were easy to bear and trivial compared to this new hardship.<sup>2</sup>

His last seven or eight months had been practically sleepless—alcohol could no longer bludgeon him into un-

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 185.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 239, 240, 246, 247.

consciousness. At every turn of his mind a sheriff waved a court summons; while a violent cough tearing through his chest harassed the peaceful night. Did Branwell have consumption? Apparently he did.<sup>1</sup> He was a chaos of morbid and inter-acting symptoms that brought on fits and a dreadful physical weakness. He had stopped trying to write; and, according to Charlotte, his sisters never told him of their books lest they appear to taunt him for his failures.<sup>2</sup> On a Sunday three months before his death, while the others were in Church, he sent a desperate note to the sexton:

"Dear John,—I shall feel very much obliged to you if you can contrive to get me five pence worth of Gin in a proper measure. Should it be speedily got I could perhaps take it from you or Billy at the lane top, or, what would be quite as well, sent out for, to you. I anxiously ask the favour because I know the good it will do me. Punctually at Half-past Nine in the morning you will be paid the 5d. out of a shilling given me then.—Yours,

P. B. B."

How crafty, poor devil, in his decline!<sup>3</sup>

By August his constitution had been shattered; he lay in a heavy-breathing stupor most of the day; and turned the nights gruesome, shouting that either he or Papa would be dead by morning. But in spite of real danger Mr. Brontë continued to sleep in the same room, bravely and tenaciously hoping that by trusting instead of repudiating he could influence his son for good. In the morning Branwell would saunter out, saying, "The poor old man and I have had a terrible night of it. He does his best—poor old man!" and then whimper: "It's *her* fault—*her* fault." . . .<sup>4</sup>

One night Charlotte, seeing an evil brightness through a crack in his door, had cried, "Emily! the house is on fire!" and Emily, running out of the box-room and remembering her father's life-long fear, had put her finger to her lips, and rushed downstairs and caught up the two full pails always

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 315.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 262; IV, 200. This, in spite of George Searle Phillips' statement that Branwell told him at the Black Bull that more people visited Haworth since the authorship of the novels had been acknowledged. (*The Mirror*, December, 1872.)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 138, 178, 223, 224, 256.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 240; Gaskell, 290, 291.

left standing in the hall for just such an emergency, and, dashing back to the room where Branwell's besottment had upset a lamp, thrown water on the blaze. Fortunately it had not reached the woodwork. She dragged Branwell from his scorched bed, and stowed him in her own bed, and spent that night on the horsehair couch in the living-room.<sup>1</sup>

Another day Branwell's old friend Francis Grundy, stopping at the Black Bull, sent a dinner invitation up to the "great, square, cold-looking Rectory." Into a dining-room cheerful with firelight, with red curtains reflected in silver and glass, the Rev. Brontë, less grandisonian than formerly, was shown; who explained in a hopeless voice, but with great affection for his son, that Branwell was rousing out of bed. Presently through the door a red-thatched head was cautiously thrust. The cheeks were yellow and hollow; the eyes unnaturally sunken. Greeting his guest with what gaiety he could muster, Grundy pressed upon him two stiff glasses of hot brandy, while Branwell muttered something about leaving a warm bed to come out into the cold. Then gradually growing more like himself he ate a little dinner—the first he had eaten for days—and once again chatted pleasantly, even brilliantly. He said he was waiting for death and would welcome it; then, slipping a carving-knife out of his coat-sleeve, confessed he had believed Grundy's summons from the Devil, and come to dispose of the fiend. . . . Later the two friends parted in the lane, Branwell standing barcheaded, tears in his eyes.<sup>2</sup> . . .

Two days before his death he went into the village and visited the house of Mrs. Ratcliffe and her sister. They saw that he was changed, his tawny mane more than ever dishevelled, his old look of intense enjoyment gone, his bright eye dulled, his fund of anecdote and poetry dried up at its source. Yet they did not suspect how near death was; only teased him about his scarecrow thinness. "Have you got your father's coat on?" they asked.

The next day he was unable to get up. But this inertia was different. By a miracle he was softened; was repentant: the old loving and lovable Branwell. He did not lose consciousness. The last day, when Papa prayed over him, raising himself with difficulty he whispered "Amen." The

<sup>1</sup> Robinson, 168-170. This story was confirmed by Dr. Ingham of Haworth.

<sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 258, 259.

final conflict lasted only twenty minutes.<sup>1</sup> As in Emily's poem, "A Death Scene":

Then his eyes began to weary,  
 Weighed beneath a mortal sleep;  
 And their orbs grew strangely dreary,  
 Clouded, even as they would weep.  
 But they wept not, but they changed not,  
 Never moved, and never closed;  
 Troubled still, and still they ranged not—  
 Wandered not, nor yet reposed!  
 So I knew that he was dying—  
 Stooped, and raised his languid head;  
 Felt no breath, and heard no sighing,  
 So I knew that he was dead.<sup>2</sup>

He lay so serene and contained, it was impossible to believe he had ever been reckless.

The father—frail old man—grieved terribly. It was a case of "O my son Absalom my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Anne was deeply sorrowful; but her imagination was so limited she had experienced Branwell's life only from without, and so saw tragedy where it was not, and did not see it where it was.

Charlotte was put to bed. "Bilious fever" the doctor diagnosed it; but one suspects it came from looking on the defencelessness of Branwell whom—if legend be true—she had not spoken to, except when strictly necessary, for two years. She wrote Mr. Williams on October 2: "'We have buried our dead out of our sight.' . . . I do not weep from a sense of bereavement—there is no prop withdrawn, no consolation torn away, no dear companion lost—but for the wreck of talent, the ruin of promise, the untimely dreary extinction of what might have been a burning and a shining light. . . . Nothing remains of him but a memory of errors and sufferings." Indeed she wrote to several people about "all his vices . . . every wrong he had done, every pain he had caused . . . sins . . . scarlet in their dye . . . his brief, erring, suffering, feverish life. . . ." and again

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 257, 258, 265; Chadwick, 360. The legend that he died standing on his feet is omitted because John Brown, who saw him immediately after his death and heard all the particulars, denied that this macabre heroism was true.

<sup>2</sup> December 2, 1844.

"all his vices"—and said she forgave him. She did not realize that her kind of forgiveness was no forgiveness at all; that the only true kind was Emily's which remembered nothing to his detriment and could never have spoken—and especially at this time, and to outsiders—of Branwell's life in those terms. To Mr. Williams, during the summer, Charlotte had written: "One's heart is wrung for Mirabeau. . . ." For Mirabeau—Mirabeau! Her heart was not wrung for Branwell. "What made him go ever wrong, tend ever downwards? . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Emily wrote no letters; but she may have remembered her poem, "The Wanderer from the Fold," written March 11, 1844, when the Luddendon Foot disgrace had begun Branwell's long death and so in a sense been his real one, inasmuch as the end of every process is contained in its beginning. The poem is not good as verse but fine as the sentiment of Emily for Branwell, of an utterly altered Heathcliff for a better-intentioned Hindley:

How few, of all the hearts that loved,  
Are grieving for thee now;  
And why should mine to-night be moved  
With such a sense of woe?

Too often thus, when left alone  
Where none my thoughts can see,  
Comes back a word, a passing tone  
From thy strange history.

Sometimes I seem to see thee rise,  
A glorious child again;  
All virtues beaming from thine eyes  
That ever honoured men;

Courage and truth, a generous breast  
Where sinless sunshine lay:  
A being whose very presence blest  
Like gladsome summer day.

O, fairly spread thy early sail,  
And fresh, and pure, and free,  
Was the first impulse of the gale  
Which urged life's wave for thee!

Why did the pilot, too confiding,  
Dream o'er that ocean's foam,  
And trust in Pleasure's careless guiding  
To bring his vessel home?

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 261-266.

For well he knew what dangers frowned,  
 What mists would gather dim;  
 What rocks and shelves and sands lay round  
 Between his port and him.

The very brightness of the sun,  
 The splendour of the main,  
 The wind which bore him wildly on  
 Should not have warned in vain.

An anxious gazer from the shore—  
 I marked the whitening wave,  
 And wept above thy fate the more  
 Because—I could not save.

It recks not now, when all is over:  
 But yet my heart will be  
 A mourner still, though friend and lover  
 Have both forgotten thee!<sup>1</sup>

One reason for Emily's early jealousy of Branwell, and later tenderness and patience, was that she saw in him something that was in herself, if only madness: his actual at times, hers threatening. He was the genuine male; she in a sense the would-be, the counterfeit and sham. Or was it the other way around—she the genuine, and he the counterfeit? At all events his death—the first she had ever witnessed—meant in her case plunging more deeply, deeply into reality. This reality was not of the body, but of the mind and spirit. Why should one wish to cleave to the body? She had suspected the foolishness of this cleaving, before; now her suspicion was confirmed. The body, above ground no less than below, was dust. And more than ever, now, "she held that mercy and forgiveness are the divine attributes of the Great Being who made both man and woman, and that what clothes the Godhead in glory, can disgrace no form of feeble humanity."<sup>2</sup>

From an undated poem of about this time it appears that after Branwell's death much which had troubled her was dismissed:

Strong I stand, though I have borne  
 Anger, hate, and bitter scorn;  
 Strong I stand, and laugh to see  
 How mankind have fought with me.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The *Shakespeare Head Bronte* calls this poem "probably Emily's last"—a supposition corrected by the Smith Manuscript which reveals for the first time its proper date: March 11, 1844. That manuscript bears also this pencil comment: "On a Life Perverted."

<sup>2</sup> Preface to the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights*.

<sup>3</sup> Autumn, 1849.



And staunchly, remembering her own puniness:

I condemn  
All the puny ways of men.<sup>1</sup>

What was a mortal but a “thing of dust with boundless pride”? Branwell . . . herself . . . everyone . . . presently all would be

Deep, deep down in the silent grave,  
With none to mourn above.<sup>1</sup>

She went to Branwell’s funeral, and listened to the funeral sermon, sitting, dressed in black,<sup>2</sup> in the cold Church; and caught a little cold; and after that never went out again.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Autumn, 1849.

<sup>2</sup> Chadwick, 297.

<sup>3</sup> Robinson, 297.

## XXXI

### VIRTUAL SUICIDE

IF a person knows that to do a certain thing means death, and does it, that is suicide. If a person knows that not to do a certain thing means death, and deliberately does not do it, that is virtual suicide. Suicide (like sin) may be by omission as well as by commission. Thus the death of Emily Brontë was almost as much suicide as if she had drunk of a deadly poison; or not being able to swim, had jumped into deep water; or had put a bullet through her heart. For she knew—she could not have avoided knowing—that the inflammation of the lungs which developed from the slight cold caught at Branwell's funeral would grow worse if neglected; and later (so terrible were her symptoms) that her phthisis, if neglected, would prove fatal; yet steadfastly, to the end, refused all aid from others, and would not in the least way aid herself. More than that—though she had resolved on the negative rather than positive form of suicide, so strong was her craving for the sweetness of the tomb, she committed certain overt acts, so to speak, definitely calculated to hasten her progress thereto.

This conclusion is based not only upon her last three months, but on all that went before, particularly as revealed directly and lyrically in her poetry and indirectly and allegorically in her prose.

Branwell's case had been quite different. If suicide is the wish, finding the means, to die (whether by crucially doing or crucially failing to do), Branwell's death was merely death. For his desire for extinction was only spasmodic, and had the insubstance of whim; rising more from a wish to be dramatic and tragic and pitiful than from any dignity of decision; and was therefore spurious. Death crept up on him; he did not go out to meet it. He could not go out to meet it, being morally too weak. He was incapable of copying Emily, who quietly recognized that material life had never offered her very much and now offered nothing at all, and, like the ancient stoics, deliberately quitted the house that smoked. He could not reason, as Emily undoubtedly did, that positive self-destruction was not permitted, since it was violence (if not arrogance), but that negative self-destruction positively entered upon was under some circumstances justifiable.

Many things that autumn of 1848 contrived, subtly, to help Emily to help death. Charlotte was bilious, at first, and therefore less noticing. On October 9 she wrote: "Emily and Anne are pretty well, though . . . Emily has a cold and cough at present;" but five days later: "My dear sisters are pretty well." The east wind sharpened its blade on the cold moors; and went, and came, and went, and cut, erratically. Charlotte sat muffled by the fireside reading a batch of books from 65 Cornhill; and Emily read too, but between chores.<sup>1</sup> When she finished sewing she put her thimble and reels into a small tin cash-box<sup>2</sup> which had belonged to Branwell.

Then almost overnight Charlotte was aware of a danger. "Emily's cold and cough," she wrote Ellen October 29, "are very obstinate. I fear she has pain in the chest, and I sometimes catch a shortness in her breathing, when she has moved at all quickly. She looks very, very thin and pale. Her reserved nature occasions me great uneasiness of mind. It is useless to question her; you get no answers. It is still more useless to recommend remedies; they are never adopted." Thus October passed into November.<sup>3</sup>

But now everyone in the house was more or less sick—Papa, Charlotte, Anne, and Tabby. Emily having always been hardy, unconsciously they expected her to be hardy, now, and fill the breach. In this fallacy she abetted them—though her appetite had failed, and she craved only acids, and felt a constant thirst; though in the morning she was drowsy, even exhausted; and expectoration accompanied her racking cough.<sup>4</sup>

A little later Charlotte wrote in admiration, while at last truly anxious: "She is a real stoic in illness: she neither seeks nor will accept sympathy. . . . To put any question, to offer any aid, is to annoy; she will not yield a step before pain or sickness till forced; not one of her ordinary avocations will she voluntarily renounce. You must look on and see her do what she is unfit to do, and not dare to say a word—a painful necessity for those to whom her health and existence are as precious as the life in their veins. When she is ill there seems to be no sunshine in the world for me. The tie of sister is near and dear indeed, and I think a certain harshness in her powerful and peculiar character only makes me cling to her the more. . . ."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 264–266.

<sup>2</sup> Museum.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 268.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 268, 269, 292, Note.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 269.

Charlotte announced that Mr. Smith was going to send some more books, and Emily was glad. But her very pleasure seemed darkly presageful, like the heightening of fever. Charlotte tried to be optimistic. "That will seem to me a happy day," she wrote Mr. Williams, now a *grande confidente*, "when I can announce to you that Emily is better. Her symptoms continue to be those of slow inflammation of the lungs, tight cough, difficulty of breathing, pain in the chest, and fever. We watch anxiously for a change for the better—may it soon come." But it was near the end of November, almost December, and every day Emily became weaker, her cough more rasping.<sup>1</sup> As Charlotte—who now realized to the full how intensely she loved her strange sister—wrote of this period later: "Never in all her life had she lingered over any task which lay before her, and she did not linger now. She sank rapidly. She made haste to leave us. . . . Day by day, when I saw with what a front she met suffering, I looked on her with an anguish of wonder and love. I have seen nothing like it; but, indeed, I have never seen her parallel in anything. Stronger than a man, simpler than a child, her nature stood alone."<sup>2</sup>

When Mr. Williams wrote recommending homœopathy, Charlotte showed Emily the letter hopefully; while being careful not to recommend that cure herself, lest it be opposed. "Mr. Williams' intention was kind and good," said Emily, "but he was under a delusion. Homœopathy is only another form of quackery." Again they urged her to see Dr. Wheelhouse, the local doctor. No, she said. Then a doctor from Keighley or Leeds? "No poisoning doctor shall come near me," said Emily; and continued to sleep in her small room without heat, rising to do the heaviest tasks. She was all right, she said. "The awful point was," Charlotte wrote in after years, "that while full of ruth for others, on herself she had no pity; the spirit was inexorable to the flesh; from the trembling hand, the unnerved limbs, the fading eyes, the same service was exacted as they had rendered in health."<sup>3</sup> Never once was a stethoscope put on her chest.

One evening, since Emily appeared slightly better, Charlotte read aloud a review of the Bells' poetry from the *North American Review*; in which the critic E. P. Whipple

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 270–272.

<sup>2</sup> Biographical Notice.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*; and *Life and Letters*, II, 286, 287, 293.

spoke of Ellis as a "man of uncommon talents, but dogged, brutal and morose." Sitting in her chair the pale and wasted Emily smiled faintly, half-scornful and half-amused.<sup>1</sup>

The next day she was not better; and into Charlotte's voice crept despair: "She has not rallied yet. She is *very* ill. I believe, if you were to see her, your impression would be that there is no hope. A more hollow, wasted, pallid aspect I have not beheld"—and went on to describe the deep, tight cough, the breathing which after the least exertion was a rapid pant, the pain in her chest and side, the pulse beat (the one time she suffered it to be counted) at 115, and her displeasure at the least allusion to her illness. "Our position is, and has been for weeks, exquisitely painful. . . . I think Emily seems the nearest thing to my heart in this world," wrote Charlotte. "God only knows how this is to terminate."<sup>2</sup>

Would Emily like Ellen Nussey to come?—perhaps she could cheer them all up. No. The answer to everything was No. To life on this earth, No. Doubtless Emily felt that another pair of eyes on her would be too much. She was managing this dying very well. But she was only human.

"I hope still—for I *must* hope," wrote Charlotte—"for she is dear to me as life—if I let the faintness of despair reach my heart I shall be worthless. . . . She is too intractable. I *do* wish I knew her state and feelings more clearly."<sup>3</sup>

How could Emily tell anyone her state and feelings? There was an absolute necessity to keep her family at bay. For she meant to die moving among them; meant both to hasten and to pour scorn upon death by acting as if there were no such thing.

Some of her undated poems of this last period interpret her mood—as the following sad and lovely farewell:

Was it with the fields of green,  
Blowing flower and budding tree,  
With the summer heaven serene,  
That thou didst visit me?

No: 'twas not the flowering plain;  
No: 'twas not the fragrant air;  
Summer skies will come again,  
But thou wilt not be there.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 287.      <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 288.      <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 289.

<sup>4</sup> All the poems quoted in this chapter were written in the autumn of 1848, except where noted.

And she wrote, in memory of Branwell's funeral-day or in anticipation of her own:

How loud the storm sounds round the hall,  
From arch to arch, from door to door;  
Pillar and roof and granite-wall  
Rock like a cradle in its roar.

That elm-tree by the haunted well  
Greets no returning summer skies:  
Down with a rush the giant fell,  
And stretched athwart the path it lies.

Hardly had passed the funeral train,  
So long delayed by wind and snow;  
And how they'll reach the house again  
Tomorrow's sun perhaps will show.

And this touchingly significant quatrain:

O evening! why is thy light so sad?  
Why is the sun's last ray so cold?  
Hush! our smile is as ever glad,  
But my heart is growing old.

And this remembrance of a beginning, at the end:

When days of beauty deck the vale,  
Or stormy nights descend,  
How well my spirit knows the path  
On which it ought to wend!

It seeks the consecrated spot  
Beloved in childhood's years;  
The space between is all forgot,  
Its sufferings and its tears.

And this beautiful and heart-breaking instruction, when love of nature menaced her tragic intention:

Fall, leaves, fall; die, flowers, away;  
Lengthen night, and shorten day!  
Every leaf speaks bliss to me,  
Fluttering from the autumn tree.  
I shall smile when wreaths of snow  
Blossom where the rose should grow;  
I shall sing when night's decay  
Ushers in a drearier day.

Her mood was the same as three years ago,<sup>1</sup> when the

<sup>1</sup> May 28, 1845.

weather had grown dark at her command; but now the pathos was plainer:

Heavy hangs the rain-drop  
From the burdened spray;  
Heavy broods the damp mist  
On uplands far away.

Heavy looms the dull sky,  
Heavy rolls the sea;  
And heavy throbs the young heart  
Beneath that lonely tree. . . .

Such was Emily's state; such the gist of her thoughts, this autumn of 1848, as November drew on to December. Did Charlotte see the new poems? Probably not. Yet, though they were hidden and Emily's lips tight-sealed, Charlotte might still have known the secret of Emily's heart simply by re-reading Cathy's cry in *Wuthering Heights*:

"The thing that irks me most is this shattered prison, after all. I'm tired of being enclosed here. I'm weary to escape into that glorious world, and be always there; not seeing it dimly through tears, and yearning for it through the walls of an aching heart; but really with it and in it. You think you are better and more fortunate than I, in full health and strength; you are sorry for me—very soon that will be altered. I shall be sorry for you. I shall be incomparably above and beyond you all."

That was the point: "I am weary to escape into that glorious world and *be always there*." At present she was there only part of the time; for the true mystic experience is not often achieved—that union with a force not of earth and so not containable in any earthly term nor conformable to any earthly image. She had found it the one perfect experience in an imperfect life; she wanted more of it; she believed that the only way to get more of it—this union with the divine—was to die. To die was a heavy price to pay, but not too high. As she prepared to pay it, she must have had moments of fierce immeasurable bliss. Alone and shivering in the dark, in her bare little room,<sup>1</sup> knowing they were peering at and harking to her in an effort to ferret her secret, she must have had moments of pure ecstasy when it seemed as if already she had died and left

<sup>1</sup> Since her return from Thorp Green Anne had slept in the large bedroom with Charlotte. (*Life and Letters*, II, 300.)

her body behind, and was at last utterly free, answerable to no one, released, out of Yorkshire, out of England, out of the world:

I'm happiest now when most away,  
I can tear my soul from its mould of clay,  
On a windy night when the moon is bright,  
And my eye can wander through worlds of light,—

When I am not, and none beside, —  
Nor earth, nor sea, nor cloudless sky,—  
But only spirit wandering wide  
Through infinite immensity.

Doubtless in the midst of such exaltation, flushed with fever, she thought what Cathy in her delirium had cried: "And that wind sounding in the firs by the lattice. Do let me feel it—it comes straight down the moor—do let me have one breath;" and again: "Oh, I'm burning! I wish I were out of doors! . . . Open the window wide: fasten it open!" Very likely, in the madness of her invitation to death, she did what Cathy had done—stood before the open casement, while a cold blast rushed through; "bent out, careless of the frosty air that cut about her shoulders as keen as a knife." She may even have slipped out of the house, those wintry nights before she was too weak, and, turning her hot face to the smiting of the wind, said a silent farewell to the moors she loved. The moors were a place; they were also a quality; and she was solaced by the conviction that she would find that quality again, at its source, when this corruptible, her body, had put on incorruption.

Out of mystical transports came "The Visionary," an expression of her intimacy with the unseen order which compasses us round. "No Coward Soul," called her last poem,<sup>1</sup> was not her last at all, having been written two years earlier. But though the first three verses of "The Visionary" had been written October 9, 1845, as part of "The Prisoner," the last two verses, as later additions, may very well have that distinction. At any rate it expresses with magnificent concision and a purity without dross the deepest sentiments of her last days. In the whole of mystic literature it is unsurpassed in sheer loyalty of the mortal to the immortal:

<sup>1</sup> Charlotte said, of "No Coward Soul," in the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights*: "The following are the last lines my sister Emily ever wrote."



Silent is the house: all are laid asleep:  
 One alone looks out o'er the snow-wreaths deep,  
 Watching every cloud, dreading every breeze  
 That whirls the 'wilderer drift, and bends the groaning trees.

Cheerful is the hearth, soft the matted floor;  
 Not one shivering gust creeps through pane or door;  
 The little lamp burns straight, its rays shoot strong and far:  
 I trim it well, to be the wanderer's guiding star.

Frown, my haughty sire! chide, my angry dame!  
 Set your slaves to spy; threaten me with shame:  
 But neither sire nor dame, nor prying serf shall know  
 What angel nightly tracks that waste of frozen snow.

What I love shall come like a visitant of air,  
 Safe in secret power from lurking human snare;  
 Who loves me, no word of mine shall e'er betray,  
 Though for faith unstained my life must forfeit pay.

Burn then, little lamp; glimmer straight and clear—  
 Hush! a rustling wing stirs, methinks, the air:  
 He for whom I wait thus ever comes to me;  
 Strange power! I trust thy might; trust thou my constancy.

To the occult, for whose drawing near she trimmed the light of her understanding that she might be ready: "Trust thou my constancy." Emily's constancy was the outstanding thing about her. No wonder she had made constancy—loyalty—the outstanding characteristic of Cathy and Heathcliff in their tortured love for each other; and even, in their separate ways, of the cruel Hindley (for his wife), of the crotchety Joseph (for the family), of Ellen Dean (in spite of narrowness), of the second Catherine (to Hareton), and of Hareton (regardless, to Heathcliff). Loyalty was as integral to Emily as the blood in her veins. That was why disloyalty at Law Hill from one she loved (whatever form it took) had wounded her terribly. That was why she had come to believe that now a deeper loyalty was required of her. Human love was not so much forgotten as comprehended in a love larger and less personal—"the star, the glorious star of Love!" To this she would give her whole self, from now on, forever, in perpetual loyalty, without fear of being rebuked. Not that she blamed her beloved of long ago. Herself had been to blame too, in another way. She thought of this, here at the end; had she ever stopped thinking of it through the years? "If I've done wrong, I'm dying for it. It is enough! You left me . . . but I won't upbraid you! I forgive you. Forgive me!"

Emily was greatly emaciated, the bony structure of her face exposed with all its meaning; though in the expression—"Ah, nothing mutable was there." The skin of people in her condition often becomes chalk-like in substance and yellowish in colour; and their eyes, large, humid, bright and very beautiful in their sunken sockets, are ominous. The seeds of consumption multiplied, and went about their fond fearful work of destruction. Let them: she welcomed the awful flowering.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Williams sent Dr. Cuiç's *Homœopathy*, and Emily read it; but the most she would concede, under pressure, was: Well, she supposed that though it could do no good, it could do no harm. By this time Mr. Brontë had opened his fat, worn and much-annotated copy of T. J. Graham's *Modern Domestic Medicine*,<sup>2</sup> published in 1826, and was diligently perusing and quoting passages . . . and thinking, My wife gone, my two little girls gone, my son . . . and looking at Emily with fear and a question. . . .

Poor Papa; Emily was very sorry that she had to do this thing to him.<sup>3</sup> They had never been very close; but of late her sympathy for him had grown. And Anne: always delicate; with no acute ailment like her own but chronically failing. They had been such fine friends, were still fine friends—but (one does not pretend when dying) their interests had diverged. And Charlotte; in her wild yet spinsterish way, how really splendid she was—who had seemed, once, her opposite, and irreconcilable. And Tabby, the ignorant old country woman with the heart of gold. She loved these people; not for the world would she hurt them; and yet she was hurting them terribly. Was it selfish not to let them minister to her? But there is no selfish or unselfish in the inevitable. Emily could die in only one way. She was thorough, and passionate, and solitary.

On December 9 Charlotte secretly sent a statement of Emily's symptoms (as far as they could be ascertained) to Dr. Eppes, an eminent London physician, asking advice. ". . . The patient's sleep is supposed to be tolerably good at intervals, but disturbed by paroxysms of coughing. Her resolution to contend against illness"—ah, that was not it, Charlotte—"being very fixed, she has never consented to lie in bed for a single day—she sits up from 7 in the morning till 10 at night. All medical aid she has rejected, insisting

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 290, 294.

<sup>2</sup> Museum.

<sup>3</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 289, 290.

that Nature should be left to take her own course. She has taken no medicine, but occasionally a mild aperient and Locock's cough wafers, about 3 per diem. . . ." A mild aperient and three cough wafers against death! It was grimly laughable. But that was the bone Emily tossed these importunate ones. Because she would *not* see a doctor (there is a legend in Haworth that one came and she locked her door against him in morbid, pathological horror of any man examining her body); would *not* submit to any ancient home-remedy, like a hot-vinegar application, a turpentine rub, carbonate of iron, cod liver oil, a blister on her chest, or "cupping." She was unused to compromising; loathed it; but for the others' peace she compromised a little—a mild aperient and three Locock wafers. . . . Dr. Eppes sent a learned opinion which Charlotte could not understand, and a bottle of medicine which Emily would not take.<sup>1</sup>

Now the time was growing short, and Emily set her rose-wood desk<sup>2</sup> to rights, deliberately destroying all clues to her inner life. Only harmless things were spared: a selection of Clarke's enigmatic and puzzle wafers for ungummed envelopes; a silver pen-holder inherited from her grandfather Thomas Branwell, bearing the initials T.B.; some Brussels bills for a tippet, and for dresses and two bonnets, receipted; the programme of a Brussels concert; a brass seal with a turned ivory handle and the words, "Forget-me-not"; three steel pen nibs; one quill nib; a broken stick of red sealing-wax, and a stub of white; two remnants of lace; a sketch of a human head; a penny postage-stamp; and a small round box housing one silver coin, two French coppers, and two mauve-coloured buttons.<sup>3</sup> . . . We do not know what became of the original manuscript of *Wuthering Heights*. But in the little nine-by-twelve-inch folding rose-wood desk, with purple-velvet lining, were found reviews clipped from *The Atlas*, *The Examiner*, *Britannia*, *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly*, and an unidentified fifth.<sup>4</sup> Not fine reviews: nothing like Sydney Dobell's later praise of the "exquisite but unconscious art" of a "wonderful author . . . a genius";<sup>4</sup> nothing like Swinburne's impassioned if delayed tribute to a "glorious and immortal lady": "It may be that not many will ever take *Wuthering Heights* to their hearts; it

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 292, Note, 293.

<sup>2</sup> Museum.

<sup>3</sup> All of these remain in the desk to-day.

<sup>4</sup> *Life and Letters*, III, 219.

is certain that those who do like it will like nothing very much better in the whole world of poetry or prose."<sup>1</sup> . . . The reviews in the rosewood desk were either inadequately admiring, like the one which speaks of the novel as "one of the most interesting novels we have read for many a long day"; or small and grudging, like the one which says that with all its originality it is "so rude, so unfinished, and so careless"; or downright cruel, like the one which calls it "inartistic . . . shocking . . . sprawling . . . disjointed. . . ."

About this time a package arrived, and Emily reminded Charlotte, when she wrote Ellen, to thank her for the crab cheese. For in the midst of death there is life.<sup>2</sup> . . .

But, for Emily, less and less life. On Monday evening December 18, when she crossed the parlour with an apronful of bread and meat and opened the door into the stone passage, to feed the cogs, she reeled, she swayed against the cold wall. Charlotte and Anne begged her to sit down, but she would not. She went forward, and strewed with her thin hands Floss's and Keeper's last supper.<sup>3</sup>

That night Charlotte read to her one of Emerson's essays—which, is not known—perhaps the one on Circles, or the one on Compensation. For a while Emily listened, and then Charlotte saw that she had ceased to listen, as if looking inward. . . .<sup>4</sup>

December 19 dawned to the sound of low moaning, audible through Emily's door; and Charlotte and Anne, listening in a sickness of anguish, knew that Emily was unconscious and suffering in her sleep, for, awake, it was not in her to complain. She rose at her usual hour, and insisted on dressing herself; and went into the big bedroom and sat by the fire, combing her hair slowly—slowly, slowly, the long dark hair. When the comb slipped from her fingers into the hot ash, and seven coarse teeth at the other end from the fine burned away, with all her will-power she was too weak to pick it up. "Martha," she said to the servant who came in, sniffing the odour of burnt bone, "my comb's down there."<sup>5</sup>

When she had groped her way downstairs to the parlour, she found Anne working and Charlotte writing a letter. "Moments so dark as these," Charlotte was writing, "I

<sup>1</sup> *Miscellanies*.    <sup>2</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 293.    <sup>3</sup> Robinson, 305.

<sup>4</sup> *Life and Letters*, II, 350.    <sup>5</sup> Museum.

<sup>6</sup> Robinson, 305, 306; *Life and Letters*, IV, 92, 93.

have never known." Emily took a needle and tried to sew, but between the needle-point and the cloth was all space, and between the poising and the plunging of that needle all time, and her eyes glazed. Thus the morning wore on, and it was noon.

Charlotte had gone out and searched the blackened slopes for one spray of beloved heather. She found just one, doubtless in some fissure under a hill, protected from the wind. Its bells were not so very withered, and she brought it back to Emily. But Emily was already withdrawn; she was remote; she was far. She did not recognize her favourite flower.

About two o'clock Charlotte and Anne cried out against the terrible change discernible in her face. The husky voice gasping from her throat was not hers, but the confusion of the final breaking up. "If you send for a doctor, I'll see him. . . ."

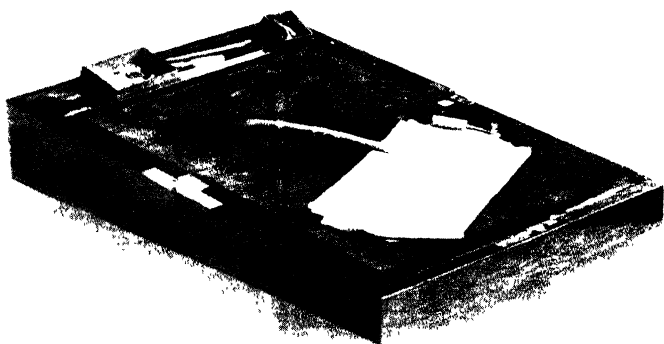
It was too late for doctors. The breath flagged; the pain was excruciating. But when they begged to put her to bed, the true Emily spoke out again. "No, no!"—and she endeavoured to rise. With only one hand touching the horsehair sofa, she stood upright. The struggle was very terrible; it seemed to last a long time, but in reality it was not so. Then she lay as self-contained as great sculpture.<sup>1</sup>

Well, let them fight for honour's breath  
Or pleasure's shade pursue—  
The dweller in the land of death  
Is changed and careless too . . .<sup>2</sup>

They buried her in the vault under the Church pavement, beside her mother, and her two sisters, and her brother. The journey out of her father's house, with the remnant of the household and Keeper in mournful attendance, had been short—not like the journey to the Parsonage twenty-eight years ago, when she and the others had come from Thornton, across the moors, in a carriage, and she had laughed and jumped out and run around, trying with the fresh eyes of a child to see what manner of place this was. . . . Before the dark hole was closed up, a minister said a few words about "ashes to ashes," and about "a sure and certain knowledge of the life everlasting."

<sup>1</sup> Robinson, 306–308; *Life and Letters*, II, 293–295, 304, 317, 324.

<sup>2</sup> From "Song," one of Emily's few still-undated poems.



Emily Brontë's rosewood desk and its contents  
(*Harworth Parsonage Museum.*)



TABLE OF THE SMITH MANUSCRIPT (CALLED BY EMILY BRONTË *GLENDALÉ POEMS*) GIVING FIRST LINES IN THE ORDER OF TRANSCRIPTION, DATES, TITLES, AND NOTATIONS.

1. "There shines the moon at noon of night." March 6, 1837. "A. to A." Unpublished.
2. "Lord of Elbë, on Elbë Hil." August 19, 1837. "A. G. A. to A. E."
3. "At such a time, in such a spot." May 6, 1840. July 28, 1843. "A. G. A. to A. S."
4. "Thou standest in the greenwood now." Undated. "To A. G. A." Unpublished.
5. "This summer wind with thee and me." March 2, 1844. "A. G. A. to A. S."
6. "O wander not so far away!" May 20, 1838. "A. G. A. to A. S."
7. "Sacred watcher, wave thy bells!" May 9, 1839. "A. G. A." Title: *To the Bluebell.*
8. "How do I love on summer nights." August 20, 1842. February 6, 1843. "Written in Aspin Castle."
9. "Well narrower draw the circle round." July 11, 1838. Title: *Douglas' Ride.*
10. "From our evening fireside now." April 17, 1839. "By R. Gleneden."
11. "Tell me, whacher, is it winter?" May 21, 1838. Title: *Gleneden's Dream.*
12. "Weeks of wild delirium past." September 1, 1841. Title: *Rosina.*
13. "Geraldine, the moon is shining." October 17, 1838. "Song by Julius Brenzaïda to A. S."
14. "I knew not 'twas so dire a crime." October 17, 1838. "Song by J. Brenzaïda to A. S." Notation: "Louis Parensell."
15. "'Twas night, her comrades gathered all." October 17, 1841. Title: *Geraldine.* Signed: "A. G. A."
16. "For him who struck thy foreign string." August 30, 1838. Title added: *The Lady to Her Guitar.*
17. "Thy sun is near meridian height." January 6, 1840. "F. De Samars. Written in the Gaaldine prison walls. To A. G. A."
18. "Light up thy halls! 'Tis closing day." November 1, 1838. "F. De Samars to A. G. A."
19. "The busy day has hurried by." June 14, 1839. "Written on returning to the P. of G. on the 10th of January 1827."
20. "All blue and bright, in glorious light." February 24, 1843. Title: *On the Fall of Zalona.*
21. "Were they shepherds who sat all day." January 1841. May 1844. "A. G. A., The Dream of."
22. "I've seen this dell in July's shine." July 12, 1839. Title: *A Farewell to Alexandria.*
23. "How few, of all the hearts that loved." March 11, 1844. "E. W. to A. G. A." Title added: *On a Life Perverted.*
24. "Come, walk with me." Undated.
25. "Thy Guardians are asleep." May 4, 1843. "E. G. to M. R." Title added: *A Serenade.*



26. "Where beams the sun the brightest." May 1, 1843. "To A. S. 1830."
27. "In the earth, the earth thou shalt be laid." September 6, 1843. Title added: *Warning and Reply*.
28. "I do not weep, I would not weep." December 19, 1841. "A. S. to G. S." Title added: *Encouragement*.
29. "'Twas yesterday at early dawn." December 19, 1843. "M. A. for the U. S."
30. "The linnet in the rocky dells." May 1, 1844. "Pub<sup>d</sup>."
31. "Listen! when your hair like mine." November 11, 1844. "From a Dungeon Wall in the Southner (?) College—J. B. Sept. 1825." Title added: *T(he) Old Man's lecture*.
32. "O Day, He cannot die." December 2, 1844. "From a D. W. in the N. C.—A. G. A. Sept. 1826." "Pub<sup>d</sup>."
33. "Come, the wind may never again." October 2, 1844. "D. G.(?) C. to J. A." Unpublished.
34. "The winter wind is loud and wild." November 6, 1844. "I. (or J.) M. to I. G."
35. "The moon is full this winter night." November 21, 1844. "M. Douglas to E. L. Glenceden."
36. "Cold in the earth and the deep snow piled above thee!" March 3, 1845. "R. Alcons to J. Brenzaida." "Pub."
37. "In the same place, when Nature wore." May 17, 1842. "H. A. and A. S."
38. "Lie down and rest, the fight is done." December 18, 1843. "Rodric Lesley. 1830." Title added: *Roderic*.
39. "A thousand sounds of happiness." April 22, 1845.
40. "Heavy hangs the raindrop." May 28, 1845. "A. E. and R. C." Title added: *The Two Children*. Contains unit beginning "Child of delight! with sunbright hair."
41. "I know that tonight the wind it is sighing." August 1845. "M. A. written on the Dungeon Wall—N. C." Signed: "M. A."
42. "Silent is the House—all are laid asleep." October 9, 1845. "Julian M. and A. G. Rochelle." Title added: *The Signal Light*. Contains first three verses of *The Visionary*; also *The Prisoner*.
43. "Why ask to know the date, the clime?" September 14, 1846. May 13, 1848. Contains unit beginning "It was the autumn of the year."

Emily Jane Brontë. - 1844 - Toronto, Canada - Feb. 19th 1844

# Grandale Poem

A. La. A.

March 6th 1844

There shines one moon, at noon at night  
Vision of glory - Dawn - at night -  
H ly so hush - and moon and stars,  
Looking down on the lonely moon -  
And hush - still - with her way  
Not down - but - straight - for ever  
Till it comes - shining - and ought - on the  
Bright - its own - or - silver sky -

Bright moon - dear moon! when Jesus have past  
My way - but - not - at night -  
And at 11 - upon the black - burst  
The solemn - eyes - solemnly - with  
And still - as - from - lower - right - moon  
Like - moon - over - black - gulf  
And - bright - the - same - but - on - to - see  
How - wildly - from - the - black - moon!  
And - I - then - was - in - the - sky  
So - much - as - by - the - moon - light  
The - light - of - the - expanding - moon  
There - was - the - black - and - white - of - light  
Not - off - the - moon - but - the - same  
Of - light - as - the - moon - light - of - the  
And - for - a - like - light - of - light - moon  
A - light - to - the - same - light - moon  
And - I - then - the - for - all - light - of - moon  
The - light - of - the - moon - light - moon  
As - if - the - moon - light - of - light  
The - light - of - the - moon - light - moon  
And - then - the - light - of - light - moon  
The - light - of - the - moon - light - moon  
The - light - of - the - moon - light - moon  
The - light - of - the - moon - light - moon

1. Facsimile of the title-page of the Smith Manuscript, containing the first half of an unpublished poem written by Emily Brontë two months before her nineteenth birthday.



Sinking to think one hour would sever  
 The sweet event would and when comes  
 To think that twilight golden glow  
 Would never pass away to him -  
 No - never more! That sunset brought  
 A thousand daisy feelings brought  
 And humming all his powers combined  
 And whisked up in his floating wind.  
 Wide, swelling woodlands seemed to rise  
 Beneath soft, sunny, southern skies -  
 Old Elhi Hall his noble home  
 Toward mid it trees, whose foliage green  
 Rustled with the kind winds that come  
 From summer meadows when most serene,  
 And bursting through the leafy shade  
 A gust of golden sunshine played;  
 Biting the walls in sunbeams light  
 And sparkling in the water clear  
 That stretched below - reflected bright  
 The white, wide world of cloudless air.  
 And still before his spirit's eye  
 Such well-known scenes would rise and fly  
 Till, suddenly with dispoir and pain  
 He found his dying face to me  
 And wildly cried, "Oh once again  
 "Might I my native country see!  
 "But once again - one single day!  
 "And must it - can't never be?  
 "To die and die so far away  
 "When life has hardly <sup>scarcely</sup> ~~ended~~ for me -  
 "August - you will see when  
 "Back to that land in health and joy I'll  
 "And thus the happy time will come  
 "Above ~~me~~ in my ~~native~~ <sup>homeland</sup> home  
 And years with that ~~many~~ <sup>same</sup> time  
 As my back ~~with~~ <sup>in</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~land~~ <sup>home</sup>  
 For you'll forget the lonely grave  
 "And mouldering crops by Elhi's wave -  
 x x x x x x x x x x



" Then strands in the greenwood now  
 " The place, the time, the scene -  
 " And here the fresh leaves gleam and glow  
 " And where, down in the lake, below  
 " The tiny ripples flame -  
 " The breeze sing like a summer breeze  
 " Should sing in summer skies  
 " And fountain-like fountains and ripples  
 " The mingled glory rise.  
 " But where is he to-day, to-day?"  
 " O questions not with me!  
 " I will not, truly, only say  
 " Where may my love be?  
 " Is he upon some distant shore?  
 " Or is he on the sea?  
 " Or is he west from dark shores  
 " A faithful heart to thee?"  
 " I he heart I love, whether beside  
 " Or far, or near, or here or there  
 " A-A wither foreign lands divide  
 " How yet the rolling waves!"  
 " Then why should sorrow cloud that brow,  
 " And dim those eyes, beaming?  
 " Reply this once, is it not thou  
 " Most faithful true to him?"  
 " I gaze upon the clouded moon  
 " And love him at the night  
 " Till morning come and sunset moon  
 " Then I forget his light -  
 " No - not forget, eternally  
 " Remember its memory dear,  
 " But could one day seem dark to me  
 " Because the night was fair?  
 " I will not weep with only one  
 " Can light my future sky.  
 " Given enough by such a radiant sun  
 " My moon of life must die."

3. Facsimile of another unpublished poem (except stanzas 7 and 8) in the Smith manuscript. Note Emily Brontë's Gondal marks and, below, the initials of Arthur Bell Nicholls.



D.C. to J.A.

October 2<sup>d</sup> 1844

Come, the wind may never again  
Blow as now it blows for us  
And the stars may never again shine as now they shine,  
None before October's advent  
Less of blood will be poured us  
And you must count the love in your heart  
And I, the love in mine!

For face to face we'll no bloodied stand  
And so may die so we will be  
Forgetting how the same must come to a close and we must die  
One must fight for the right's power  
And one for the right of the people  
And each be ready to die his life to save the other's fall

The chance of war we must take  
Now would we should turn our backs on  
How much death would we have then found that gives'ting and  
We must live to see the nation's state  
Overcome, with the love in love,  
Must yield our blood for a stronger state and rescue ourselves.

So, the wind may never again  
Blow as now it blows for us  
And the stars may never again shine as now they shine  
Next October, the coming war  
From battle's smoke may be smogging us -  
We to strike for your life's blood and you to strike for mine.

4. Facsimile of another unpublished poem in the Smith manuscript.





R. Alcons to J. Brontës

March 3d 1845

'Cold in the earth and the deep snow piled above thee';  
Far, far removed cold in the dreary grave!  
Have I forgot, my Only love, to love thee,  
Scorned at last by Time's all-reviving wave?

Now, when stone, do my thoughts no longer hover  
O'er the mountains on Argos's shore  
Rising their wings where birds and fawn leaves cover  
That noble heart forever, ever more?

Cold in the earth, and fifteen wild Decembers  
From those brown hills have melted into spring -  
Is it not indeed as the spirit that remembers  
After such years of longing and suffering?

Sweet love of youth, forgive if I forgot thee  
While the world's lid is heaving me along  
Stronger desires and darker hopes beset me  
Hopes which obscure but cannot do thee wrong -

No other star has lightened up my heaven,  
No other star has ever shone for me  
All my life's bliss from thy dear life was given -  
All my life's bliss is in the grave with thee

But when the days of golden dreams had passed  
And even despair was powerless to destroy  
Then did I learn how existence could be cherished  
Strengthened and fed without the aid of joy

Then did I check the fire of selfish passion,  
Wished my young soul from yearning after mine,  
Steadily denied its burning wish to listen  
Down to that tomb already more than mine!

And even yet, I dare not let it languish,  
Dare not indulge in melancholy, explore pain  
Once drinking deep of that ~~delicious~~ anguish  
How could I seek the empty world again?

5. Facsimile, from the Smith manuscript, of a famous love-poem by Emily Brontë. Note identification marks by Arthur Bell Nicholls or—more probably—Charlotte Brontë.



0.9.6. 17<sup>th</sup> 1838

I know it's not so nice a crime  
To say the word, Adieu;  
But, this shall be the only time  
My slightest look shall see.

The south will  
the forest and in the east.  
It is perhaps best to visit some  
first visit, the same in me.

I can forget black you and brown  
And forget white you  
If you forget me and brown  
The white tribulation tips could brown-

It ~~hard~~ <sup>may</sup> ~~reminds~~ <sup>reminds</sup> can leave your love,  
On ~~poor~~ <sup>my</sup> walls can hold  
I would not wish to give above  
A thing so false and cold.

And mine are losses bound to mine  
 As mine links both rich and poor,  
 And mine are eyes whose lightning shine  
 Has warmed and blessed me long.

Those eyes shall make my only day,  
shall set my spirit free  
And chase the foolish thought away,  
That moun your mourning.

6. Facsimile from the Smith manuscript, showing the name "Louis Parensell" pencilled in by Arthur Bell Nicholls or more probably—Charlotte Brontë



## NOTE ON THE PORTRAIT OF EMILY BRONTË

Though labelled by the National Portrait Gallery "Emily Brontë," this portrait (see illustration facing page 90) by her brother Branwell is claimed by some people (on the ground of its resemblance to the right-hand figure in Branwell's "Gun Group") to be, in reality, a portrait of Anne; but with this view I do not hold.

My reasons are simple.

First, it was identified as Emily, not only by the widow of the Rev. Arthur Bell Nicholls, in a wardrobe of whose Irish home it gathered dust fifty-three years, but also by the late Clement Shorter, who had the inestimable advantage of talking over the Brontës in all their aspects with Mr. Nicholls himself. The widow may have arrived at her conclusion by comparing it, superficially, with the frontispiece of the Haworth Edition of *Wuthering Heights*, thought then to be Emily, but known now to be Anne; but no such precipitousness can be imputed to so able and careful a Brontë scholar as Clement Shorter. He must have had ample reason for saying definitely, It is Emily.

Second, the fact that three pictures conceded to be Anne are in straight profile does not prove that this straight profile is Anne too. Branwell painted "The Brontë Sisters" (also now in the National Portrait Gallery) at about sixteen, and the "Gun Group" (of which we have only photographs of an engraving taken from it) not much later; and as a young amateur like other amateurs kept re-painting the two poses he found easiest: to-day Emily was front face, to-morrow straight profile: the artist was incapable of subtler angles.

Third, the resemblance, such as it is, between the solitary portrait in question and Anne as conclusively identified by Ellen Nussey in the "Gun Group" is explainable by the deficiencies of the artist, and by the natural family resemblance between two sisters in age only a year and a half apart. If Emily looked enough like Charlotte for Charlotte to weep at her own portrait by Richmond, Emily could look (especially if undifferentiated by a first-rate portrait-painter) bewilderingly like Anne. Their faces, as well as dresses, were similar. Personally I think the resemblance between the pictures has been overstressed. The solitary portrait, cut away from some larger study, shows a much stronger personality than the other profiles. Nor is the reverse argument valid: that the single portrait does not resemble Emily in "The Brontë Sisters"; for Mr. Nicholls, who saw her almost every day for several years, expressly declared that that plump Emily bore not the least likeness to Emily in life.

Indeed, in spite of the contrary impression of the Rev. Sherrard of Banagher, I would not be astonished if this were the "lost portrait" of Emily which Mr. Nicholls gave Martha Brown, and Sir W. Robertson Nicoll, to his lasting regret, did not buy when he had the opportunity, in Haworth, in 1879; for Martha Brown would not have destroyed it, and if she sold it or it was sold with her other treasures after her death, doubtless it would have come to light by now; and what more natural than that, near death, she should give it back to the one other who had, not a literary, but close personal interest in the subject?

Fourth and last, if the soul, as I believe, forms its own body, this single portrait, alone among the portraits of the Brontë sisters, *deserves to be Emily*, for here only, through Branwell's inexpertness, shone the power and poetry which were her inalienable characteristics.

Other arguments could be cited, but these are the main ones. To me they are convincing.

V. M.

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